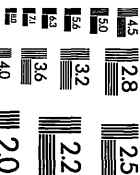
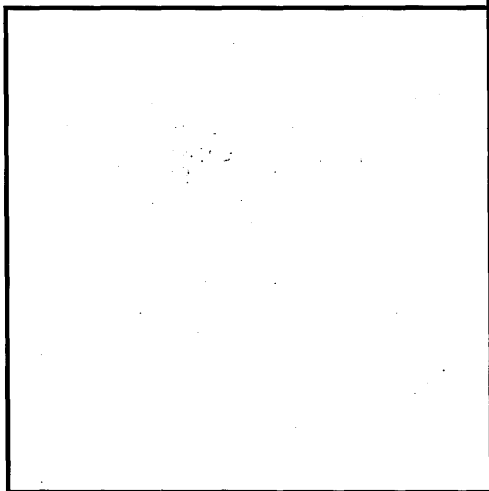
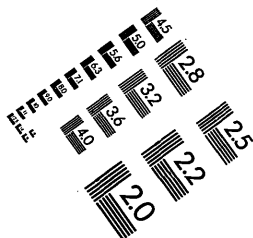


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# **The Character Outcome of Present-Day Religion**

**300 CHURCHMEN JUDGE THE EFFECT OF  
CURRENT TEACHING AND PREACHING**

**GEORGE HERBERT BETTS**  
Northwestern University



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## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
PREFACE.....	5
I. PROBLEM AND PURPOSE.....	7
II. THE CHURCHMEN ON CHARACTER OUTCOMES..	12
III. GIVING RELIGION ITS CHANCE.....	49
IV. STEPS TOWARD IMPROVEMENT.....	96





## PREFACE

THE question before us on these pages is, broadly, that of the church's confidence in its own program. More specifically, it is the estimate of some three hundred leading Protestant churchmen of the effectiveness of the Christian religion as it is interpreted in present-day teaching and preaching to influence conduct and character.

It should be clear at the beginning that this study is no attempt on the part of the author to measure or himself pass upon the effectiveness of current teaching and preaching. The inquiry deals, rather, with the opinion of the church itself on this point. Some two years ago when the writer made a study of the beliefs of a portion of the clergy on the basic positions of the Christian faith and published the results in *The Beliefs of 700 Ministers*, he received many letters of protest against raising such a question. The implication was that if there is heterodoxy abroad among the clergy, it had better be kept covered up. Some no doubt will think the same about the present study. With this point of view I am utterly at variance, believing that honest and informed thought never turns up anything that needs covering. And thought clarifies and corrects itself by contact with other thought.

In this study two questions were asked of the correspondents: one concerning the effectiveness of religion as currently interpreted through teaching and preaching, the other concerning the causes of such failure as may exist in religion carrying over into ethical results. The contents of this book are based upon the replies received, so it may be looked upon as primarily a report of an investigation, with an interpretation of the results.

That the church, as is the case with the public school, is turning its attention increasingly to the character outcome of its activities there can be no question. If this little monograph helps in any degree toward such a shift in emphasis, its purpose will have been fully accomplished.

It would be ungracious to omit here an expression of appreciation and gratitude to the many busy churchmen who gave of their time and thought to write careful, penetrating letters, often of considerable length, in reply to the questions asked. That the writer does not agree with all of them is no proof of their unwisdom. For himself and his readers he thanks them.

## CHAPTER I

### PROBLEM AND PURPOSE

MUCH argument without discernible proof and many assertions without supporting facts have recently come from press, platform, and pulpit on the question whether morals are better or worse than in former times. Who cares? Let the dead past bury its dead. Our problem is not to seek a comparative vindication of our current shortcomings but to learn how to improve the quality of life to-day.

And the most optimistic of us will admit that there is room for improvement. Old codes have been giving way faster (they always do) than new ones have been evolved to take their place. The Wickersham Report is hardly reassuring. Our proclivities have enriched the language with such terms as *bootlegger*, *rum row*, *gangster*, *racketeer*, *companionate*, *Reno*. Then also consider the governors impeached, the high officials sent to prison, the judges deposed, the senators refused seats, the monkeys and crooks elected to be mayors of large cities, and other evidences of a troubled democracy. Do not overlook, either, the frequent injustice of our industrial system to the weak. Give a thought to our overflowing peniten-

tiaries, our congested courts, our easy tolerance of the thriving union of politics and crime with their offspring of violence and vice. We humans are doing pretty well in the mastery of our physical environment, but our progress in social adjustment and spiritual evolution seems erratic and uncertain—with now and then a “reversion to type.”

To what extent should the church hold itself responsible for the moral conditions of the times? One thing appears clear: Whatever the exact degree of responsibility the church must accept, this is far from full responsibility. For the church is only one among social institutions, and there are many factors which the church cannot directly control. The family and the school both have much closer contact with the young than the church can possibly have and must assume corresponding responsibility for conduct and character. The whole social matrix in which the individual finds himself acts to condition his moral quality. There are factors in the movies, the radio, the press which are constantly working counter to the church's influence. Questionable but accepted political and industrial practices followed by successful men in good social standing often contradict the standards taught by the church.

Again, the church is handicapped in bringing its influence to bear because an indifferent and pleasure-bent people absent themselves from its teaching and preaching.

Attesting this fact are the crowded conditions of the highways, the golf courses, the beaches, and other pleasure resorts on Sundays while Protestant churches are relatively deserted. How shall they repent except they hear?

From another point of view the church must assume responsibility, at least in purpose, for all these conditions. For it is the purpose—perhaps even the inescapable responsibility—of the church so to spiritualize men that its spirit and teachings will permeate and sublimate the other social institutions and act as a universal leaven to human life. No one of intelligence will expect the church, any more than other institutions, to work with one hundred per cent of efficiency. But to throw the blame for indifference or unsatisfactory moral conditions too completely on agencies outside the church is for the church to confess failure in its purpose to spiritualize life. If, without becoming discouraged or pessimistic, the church will say, "The low moral standards, the corruption in politics, the unfairness and cruelty in industry and commerce, the disobedience to law, the empty churches, the false philosophies of life—these are my responsibility even if they are not all my blame,"—if the church will seriously and prayerfully say this, its power may greatly increase.

In order to obtain at least a hint of how churchmen are thinking on such questions as the foregoing, the writer

decided to go directly to a cross section of the church and ask members for their views. For this purpose he took one thousand names from the list of those invited to the Northwestern University conference on religion and conduct held late in the year 1929. This list included ministers, directors of religious education, members of overhead church organizations, professors in colleges and seminaries, and laymen active in the church. From them he asked answers to two fundamental questions:

1. *Do our churches to-day teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character?*
2. *If they do, why is it not working better to that end?*

Three hundred of the correspondents replied, the distribution being as follows:

Ministers.....	63
Directors of religious education.....	45
Members of overhead organizations.....	55
Professors in colleges and seminaries.....	96
Laymen active in the church.....	41

It cannot, of course, be claimed that this group represents the mind of the church as a whole. In the first place the number is too small. Then also these persons are highly "selected," as the statistician would say, for their rather specialized interest in the church and its activities. It is probable, however, that we have here

a fair cross section of the better informed and more progressive thought of the church on the problems concerned—a straw by which to tell the way the ecclesiastical wind is blowing.

The next chapter presents the churchmen's estimate of the effectiveness of present-day teaching and preaching in the shaping of conduct and character; that is, their answer to question No. 1.

## CHAPTER II

## THE CHURCHMEN ON CHARACTER OUTCOMES

THIS was the form of the question: *Do our churches to-day teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character?*

Admittedly this question cannot be answered without qualification. Nor will the same answer apply to all the churches; for churches differ quite as much as do schools or homes in their effectiveness. Admitted also is the fact that the term "effectively" is subject to quite different interpretations by different persons. Our correspondents were therefore asked to write whatever convictions possessed their minds rather than to stop with a simple Yes or No answer. Of the 300 replying 248 gave Yes, No, or *qualified* answers to the question of sufficient definiteness to admit of tabulation, as follows:

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS GIVING YES, NO, OR QUALIFIED  
ANSWERS TO QUESTION NO. I

GROUP	Yes	No	Quali- fied
	%	%	%
Ministers (53).....	28	45	27
Directors of religious education (33).....	28	36	36
Members of overhead organizations (45).....	27	20	53
Professors in colleges and seminaries (86).....	29	34	37
Laymen active in the church (31).....	25	50	25
Combined total (248).....	28	36	36



The first thing that strikes one in these figures is that the combined total shows only a little more than one person out of four (28 per cent) who is convinced that the preaching and teaching of the church presents a religion effective for conduct and character; and that nearly three fourths (72 per cent) either qualify their answers or say "No" to the question. The "Yes" column differs but little for the five groups, while the "No" column varies from 20 per cent for the overhead organization men to 45 per cent for the ministers and 50 per cent for the laymen.

At the risk of being tedious let me again emphasize the fact that these answers do not *prove* the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of preaching and teaching. Our point for the moment is the churchmen's *estimate* of that effectiveness—the degree of confidence they have in the church's present program.

What many will interpret as a hopeful sign is that the ministers are sharper in their criticism than most of the other groups, 45 per cent unqualifiedly denying the moral effectiveness of present-day preaching and teaching, with only laymen (50 per cent) going beyond them. Only 20 per cent of the overhead organization men make so severe a stricture, and the combined total is but 36 per cent. Surely, in so far as these ministers are typical the clergy cannot be accused of overcomplacency.

Several correspondents urged caution in condemning

the church for inefficiency, saying that no other institution—state, school, family—is wholly efficient. This is, of course, true, and the caution is fair, as we have previously indicated, but, after all, there is a difference. Our question does not ask concerning the effectiveness of the *whole complex program* of the church but inquires about the soundness of the very heart of the enterprise—the *quality of the religion for ethical outcomes* which the church teaches and preaches. To question this is like questioning the principle of democracy for the state; if three fourths of our people believed that democracy, as we interpret it, was ineffective as a basis for government and citizenship, we should be on doubtful ground politically. If less than 30 per cent of modern society believed in the effectiveness of the school or of the monogamous family to accomplish its objectives, the future of these institutions would be uncertain.

But statistical tables are rather barren things taken by themselves alone. Let us turn next to excerpts from the personal letters of our correspondents which bear on the question. That more of the excerpts comment on the negative than the affirmative of the question is not due to any selection made by the author but to the character of the comments themselves. The writers who said, "Yes, present-day teaching and preaching are effective for character," were in the main satisfied to let their answer stand without explanation. Those who

answered "No" seemed to feel under obligation to "explain their vote."

COMMENTS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PRESENT-DAY  
TEACHING AND PREACHING FOR CONDUCT  
AND CHARACTER

*Ministers*

One pastor who evidently believes that religion should profoundly affect personality writes:

"One is still serenely tolerated as a pillar of the church whose personal integrity may be beyond question, but whose social attitudes are narrow and pagan. The emphasis of our religion is too largely upon the business of getting saved—without much regard for what purpose one is saved beyond "safety-first in the life hereafter." My growing conviction is that Christianity as preached and taught in our churches is often inadequate to make men and women big enough to be Christians, to say nothing about making them gentlemen and gentlewomen."

Another thus contrasts present-day teaching in the church with preaching:

"I do not believe the religion that most of our churches are *preaching* is having much to do with conduct. The approach that religious education is making to character building, however, is becoming increasingly effective."

Conviction rings in this expression of faith in the power of conversion to affect character:

"On the whole our churches are teaching and preaching a religion that not only can but does effectively influence

conduct and character. If there are individual churches, or denominations, where this is not true, it is because someone has forgotten that what Christ told Nicodemus is just as true for people now as it was for him: 'Ye must be born again.' "

Deeply moved is this young preacher as a result of his self-diagnosis:

"I feel that until recently my preaching and teaching have been impotent in the lives of my people. I have seen no actual carry-over into life of the thing that I was trying to preach and teach. I and others have said, 'Come to Jesus,' and it has had no content or meaning. We have given an intellectual assent to the great basic facts of Christianity but we have hesitated and failed to bring to grips in life the interpretation of these truths. Work with the young people especially has come to seem much of a farce to me. We who have the care of these youths have had nothing vital to give them. I feel that this is true all over the land. I am sure that it is true in most of the churches that I know anything about. My preaching must be different if it is to have any meaning, content, or vitality for this day of clamoring voices. I think there are but few pulpits that are meeting the issue."

One is glad to have such criticisms as the following come from the preachers themselves rather than from their hearers:

"While there is no question but that religion is a power, there is much doubt as to whether people are receiving it from the churches. I think that modern preaching is on the whole sound, though a great deal of it unnecessary.

The most that can be said for preaching in many places is that it is a pretty dry gospel rather aloof from practical living. As for the teaching of conduct, the materials and programs would be effective in character training if carried out. However, they are rarely followed. Very few churches are effectively teaching a religion that will influence conduct and character."

"We teach and preach a religion that posits an ideal whose every action is based on right conduct; but I feel definitely that we fail in making this carry over into the actual living of our youth."

"Most of our churches do not to-day preach and teach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character. There is sufficient idealism in our religious teaching but not enough of that which is practical."

A preacher well known on two continents has this to say:

"Our churches of to-day have a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character, but that religion is neither taught nor preached effectively to the modern mind. I find very little that grips my interest in the average sermon or church program of to-day. Am I a heathen, or am I seeking something that is real?"

Note the contrast in these two statements:

"If I understand the mind of our best churchmen to-day, they are seeing religion in the terms of peace, honesty, etc., as no generation before has seen it."

"Habit and conduct have been largely formed with very little influence from the church."

While these two answers are personal, their implications are no doubt meant to be general:

"I am a minister, the son and grandson of ministers. The Christian religion as taught in the churches during the last forty years is wholly responsible for the shaping of my character, whatever it may be."

"I can fairly say that I have tried to give in my sermons a content that would influence conduct and character and have set about introducing methods and curriculum in the church school which would tend to the same end. I believe my efforts are already bearing fruit."

A disturbing note appears in the complaint of this minister:

"The majority of our churches are not presenting a religion that is designed, or expected, greatly to influence character and conduct beyond the conventional standards. Our adult generation, which supplies the teachers and preachers, has not gotten away from the dogmatic and emotional tests of religion to the ethical test and standard. While an increasing number of our younger ministers do have the latter conception, one does not need to search far to find high church officials and leaders who regard the ethical emphasis as distinctly nonspiritual, if not actually heterodox. No conclusion in this field seems more clear and certain than that we are not making high ethical character and Christianity synonymous."

This is a rather terrible indictment to come from an experienced and successful pastor:

"I believe the work of most local churches contributes very little to the development of moral character. In

the community in which I live the churches which should be the throbbing centers of the community's spiritual striving are monuments to silence and indolence. They are open for a short time on Sunday, but dark and cold for the rest of the week."

Distinction between types of churches in their influence on character is made in these two comments:

"Churches, especially the liberal churches, teach and preach a religion that effectively influences conduct and character. The conservative churches of the Fundamentalistic trend, do not seem permanently to have very much influence."

"I doubt if the religion most of us teach helps much. A well-known religious organization broadcast over the radio the other day this statement: 'Do not think that any of your actions, however good, can save you. It is only the grace of God that saves you.' That doctrine does not bring much re-enforcement of religion to morality. And our more liberal churches are all at sea. I have asked many people if their religion acted as a motive to do the things they knew were right. Those who were brought up with the old fear of the Lord and of future damnation feel such a conscious motivation. But most people do not realize that their religion helps. The humanists who make a religion of their ideals of human welfare, and all of us to the extent that we follow them in this, are really effectively influencing conduct and character."

Two optimists, one of them a bishop, see hopeful signs:

"It is working better than we think. Again and again I am delighted to find in unexpected quarters how the

religious teaching of the church profoundly affects character and conduct."

"The present unrest and criticism of things-as-they-are is the most hopeful sign I see for better days to come. Blessed are the dissatisfied, for they shall seek and find."

The four quotations which follow all bear on the difference between the religious and the nonreligious (that is, nonchurch) person of to-day:

"It is impossible at present to say who are religious and who are not. The work of the church in teaching and example has spread to a considerable degree through all our civilization, and some of the most religious people I know are not now connected with the church though they perhaps owe their religiousness to the church."

"Comparison of the average active Christian with the average non-Christian indicates a certain difference in moral attitude and living. It is all wrong to say that there is no real difference between the Christian and non-Christian in this respect. Of course, I am referring to Christians actively related to some church. While we have a small proportion of people of high ethical living unrelated to the Christian Church the preponderating influences for right living to-day in our American life come directly out of the church, I feel sure."

"The religious person of to-day, generally speaking, does not differ materially from the nonreligious in everyday conduct and character. Something is radically wrong with our methods, and I believe it lies in the fact that we have been placing greater emphasis upon the ethical teachings of Jesus than we have upon his daily life and conduct. We have made his teachings an abstract matter instead of the vital, everyday issues of life."



"In everyday conduct and character there is often little difference between the religious person and the non-religious. In fact, as Shaftesbury discovered years ago when working for social legislation, one may get more support from the agnostics than from the professing Christians."

Caution has already been given against generalizing for the whole church on the basis of this small group. Yet the author knows of no reason why these men are not typical of the more forward-looking ministers at least. One would like to know whether the estimate of the moral effectiveness of current teaching and preaching as set forth by these preachers will essentially hold for the major portion of the clergy. If so, it would appear that some fundamental change may be expected in the gospel message or its method. For it is unthinkable that as intelligent and devoted a body of men as those constituting the Christian ministry should be willing to continue with a program which they believe is not effective for its major purpose.

### *Directors of Religious Education*

Though many directors of religious education are ordained ministers they of necessity see the work of the church with a somewhat different perspective from that of the preacher. On this question, however, they vary from the preachers but very little, what difference there is being toward a somewhat more favorable view of the

situation. The following are typical comments from the directors:

"Yes, we are making religion effective in conduct and character. In one public-school district where there is an epidemic of property and money dishonesty, we have been asked in to help in the solution of the difficulty through our week-day religious education. In another district we are asked to help in solving a grievous condition of sex misdemeanors."

Less confidence is evidently felt by the four directors responsible for these comments:

"In proportion to the total number of churches and to the aggregate current budgets of these churches, there is comparatively slight effective influence on conduct and character of the age group between eighteen and forty."

"The greater part of religion as now preached and taught is not very effective in influencing conduct or character. That part which might be effective is constantly being nullified by the very people who are supposed to be living the Christian life."

"I believe that in principle the churches of to-day are teaching such a religion, but I do not believe that the average church is teaching it in such a way that it becomes vital to the individual receiving the teaching."

"I think there was never a time when the churches were making a more earnest and serious attempt to teach and preach a religion which would influence conduct and character; but I fear we must recognize the sad truth that to a large extent they are failing."

These statements are typical of a more favorable point of view:

"Contact between the church and the individual whose conduct and character is to be shaped is too often too limited. Where contact is frequent and in the way of experiencing life together, I have no doubt in my own mind that character is effectively influenced."

"The church would not be here to-day if it had not been doing some effective work. Yet I feel that many of our church people are not much better than the non-religious person. Even our new emphasis in religious education hasn't seemed to reach the desired results in the children of the present."

"Emphatically so. Conduct, character, institutions, customs, civilization itself, all have been vastly influenced by the gospel as it has been preached, and, on the whole, for the best. The changes are evident in many conspicuous places, and in millions of inconspicuous places."

To what extent do religious persons differ in character from nonreligious, letting these two terms stand in general (with necessary exceptions) for the church and the nonchurch portion of society? Here are two somewhat contradictory testimonies:

"The average church differs in its social and business practices in no way from the general practices about it. What is the answer?"

"We have many illustrations here of men who are Christian differing very materially from men who are non-Christian. For instance, we have one who gave up a very satisfactory business position because his Christian

ethical standards could not tolerate some things the firm was doing. He resigned his position and was for months searching for another."

From comments such as these it is evident that directors of religious education no more than preachers are given to over-estimating the effectiveness of their programs. It is likely that the recent emphasis on the character outcome of all education has made them doubly conscious of the obligation resting on religious education to carry over into conduct.

### *Members of Overhead Organizations*

Workers in the overhead church organizations lack the close contact with individual churches had by ministers and directors, but as a compensation see the operation of many churches of varying types. Following are comments from this group on the effectiveness of present-day preaching and teaching for character outcomes.

Sharply contrasting points of view such as shown in these two statements appear often in our returns:

"On the whole our churches do teach and preach a religion that influences conduct and character. I do not believe that the fault and comparative failure of our efforts lie in the religion we teach but in our inadequate system and faulty methods. The time available for religious teaching is almost hopelessly inadequate, and it is distributed in such a way as to deprive it of whatever little value it might possess. I do not believe that we need any radical change in historical Christianity but

that we do need far-reaching changes in our church-school program."

"Our churches in the main are not teaching the character of God in sufficient completeness to make him felt as a righteous God. We believe that this quality was the great contribution of the Hebrew race to the world. Jesus taught us divine Fatherhood, but did not omit the idea of righteousness. We have taken the idea of divine love too exclusively. We need to be convicted of sin; love alone does not sufficiently do it."

A distinguished theologian recently said before a body of scholars that what the church lacks to-day is a clearer definition of the Christian doctrines and better grounding of our preachers in these fundamentals. But in comments such as the two following from men in positions of large responsibility less emphasis on doctrine and more on the problems of experience is asked:

"Some churches do, but my estimate is that only about 15 per cent of our churches teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character. Churches have preached and taught a religion which emphasizes getting ready to live (or die) and have not put emphasis upon religion as a factor in motivating conduct along specific, practical lines in the daily life and experience of the member. Churches generally have put a premium on leaders whose chief qualifications were mental assent to stated creeds rather than practical knowledge and skill in Christian nurture of childhood and youth. The qualifications for leadership have been largely in terms of an individual's participation in Sunday formalism rather than upon his daily service."

“Do our churches of to-day teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character? I think I must answer, “For the most part, no.” There are many splendid pulpits in the country that are presenting religion as a vital and dynamic force with Christ as the supreme interpreter of values. I believe that they are influencing conduct and character in a very marked degree. But also we have a very high percentage of pulpits that are still teaching and preaching religion as a body of theology to be believed and of ecclesiastical forms to be followed. We are not getting on very fast with this latter group.”

What are we to conclude from such conflicting points of view as the following, each coming from a high official in the Sunday School Board of an important denomination? Possibly our conclusion should be that we need more careful study of the outcomes of our church enterprise so that established fact may take the place of uncritical opinion:

“Our churches are not preaching and teaching a gospel that can effectively change conduct and character. The educators of the head have left the heart untouched. The gospel is not being preached or practiced by the great church masses. The youth and adults of the church cannot be distinguished from those of the world.”

“The churches to-day are teaching and preaching more effectively than ever before in their history a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character.”

The fatal divorcement suggested here of content defeated by lack of technique on the one hand, and of

technique without religious motivation on the other hand may explain much of our ineffectiveness:

“Our churches to-day are not teaching and preaching a religion that effectively influences conduct and character. As far as I can see, there seem to be two groups: one of leaders who are using an outworn terminology which is not understood by the present generation and which bears no relation to character and problems of conduct; the other made up of those who talk in terms of conduct and character but without any real religious dynamic.”

The *a priori* nature of this logic is hardly satisfying to the thorough mind, yet it is far from uncommon:

“If it is fair to assume that our churches are teaching and preaching the Christian religion, then we must say that they are teaching and preaching a religion which can effectively influence conduct and character.”

A fundamental weakness in our Protestant system is brought out in the next comment. Whatever may be true of its preaching, the church's teaching will never be effective until the church takes education in religion seriously enough to be willing to pay the price in planning, effort, and funds to secure a trained body of teachers. To teach religion is fully as difficult as to preach it:

“Do the churches of to-day teach? In ten years of experience I have found very few “teachers” in our church schools and only a half-hearted and meager effort to qualify the candidates for the position. Religious instruction has proceeded on the assumption, seemingly, that the will to do is a satisfactory substitute for ability

in doing. Formal education is even more in vogue in our church schools than in our public schools. If my observation is accurate, then our churches of to-day are not teaching a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character."

The uncertainty expressed in these two comments evidently arises from quite different causes:

"How can one say 'No' to this question when there are so many persons in the world living lives of service and nobility, who find their inspiration and strength in the teaching and preaching of the Christian Church? How can one say 'Yes' when such large areas of life are almost entirely untouched by anything like Christian principle, and when so many people are upright in personal relations, and kindly to the unfortunate, yet wholly insensitive to life's injustices and cruelties in industrial or international relations?"

"I fear that I am too much at sea on the question you asked to be able to give you any helpful response. Perhaps this confession is a significant answer in itself."

Just how ought a religious person be expected to differ from a nonreligious person in his conduct and character? One correspondent said he didn't want the religious person to differ enough to be "queer." No one does, but must one be "queer" if a vital religion takes hold of his personality? Was Jesus "queer"? Can religion make its possessor more kind, generous, forgiving, helpful, lovable, sincere, dependable, joyous? These qualities do not make one "queer." The following excerpts bear on the



difference between the religious and the nonreligious person:

"I am not so much concerned about the difference between the religious and the nonreligious person, so called."

"The nominal church-member's and the nonreligious man's conduct are so nearly alike that it is impossible to discriminate."

"In whatever business dealings I have I find repeatedly that the nonreligious are not as reliable as the faithful members of the church."

"I feel growingly conscious that religious people ought to differ more than they do from the nonreligious in character and conduct. Every preacher recognizes it, every devout layman senses it."

### *Professors in Colleges and Seminaries*

The sharp distinctions here made come from a man internationally and favorably known:

"The impression that the churches are inefficient in respect to conduct and character arises chiefly from three sources: (a) Overestimation of their actual purposes in the sphere of conduct and character. Their *actual* purposes are not revealed by the idealistic generalizations that are current in religious discourse, but by habitual choices and approvals, and by habitual acquiescence or absence of action. (b) Judgments upon conduct and character from prophetic standpoints that the churches do not accept. From the standpoint of a prophet a given church may be ineffective, while from its own standpoint it is effective. (c) The enormous differences

between churches that are called Christian. They do not teach the same religion. Hence efficiency from the standpoint of one church may be inefficiency from the standpoint of another."

Two principles are recognized among students of social institutions: (1) All institutions that serve any progressive society must be in a state of continuous reconstruction else they lose step and cease to be efficient; (2) the almost inescapable tendency of social institutions is to lose their responsiveness to immediate needs and become concerned with forms, traditions, and mechanisms rather than with realities. These principles are implied in the following six comments:

"For the most part our churches are not teaching and preaching a religion that is most effective in influencing character development in the modern world. The church is for the most part dealing with more or less traditional ideas, which are quite separate from the practical experience of our contemporary life. These ideas and practices arose out of a past experience and functioned effectively in that experience. Religion needs to discover the spiritual values that are present in the processes of our current experience and derive from these the ideas and practices that will be most effective in the spiritualization and motivation of character. The churches have not, up to this time, developed a technique for discovering these values, for expressing them and for putting them to work in the redirection of current experience."

"Do our churches of to-day teach and preach a religion that effectively influences conduct and character? I should say that they do not preach and teach such a

religion. The organized church has always fallen somewhat behind the best thought of its day; and, to put it briefly, it seems to me that that gap has in recent years been widening, not so much because the church has failed to progress, but because its rate of progression has been very much slower than that of modern life. In very many instances I fear that our churches to-day do not know how to make an appeal to young life."

"The typical church of to-day is too denominational, too doctrinal, and too traditional to influence very effectively the conduct and character of our social order. The average church member is thinking too much in such terms to make possible the effective teaching and preaching of religion."

"There is within Christianity both an adequate ideal and dynamic for conduct and character. However, this dynamic aspect of Christianity is not emphasized by the church to-day. We are too institutionally minded and engrossed in the business of getting numbers and saving souls from hell to emphasize the more important aspects of the Christian message that have to do with the evolutionary growth of character."

"Here and there are to be found ministers and laymen who have a real vision of what the religion of Jesus Christ implies; but in general we are so engrossed in the machinery of making an institution go that we have preaching and teaching, not with authority, but as the scribes."

"I think the churches of to-day are teaching and preaching a religion that in the past has affected conduct and character. But when that was the case, it was due in part, or wholly, to the fact that religion was then more thoroughly a part of the accepted tradition and general culture. In recent years we have rapidly moved out

from the old social setting in which religious tradition was most powerful and have not yet developed religious ideas and forms in keeping with our new social and industrial order. Consequently, the influence of religion is weakened by the sense of its lacking organic relation with our total life."

Referring to the comments next below, is there any "cause" which can more surely "command the total allegiance" than service for the comfort and happiness of men? Is there a "cosmic cause" to which Jesus should have been giving his devotion when he was serving and comforting the needy? Is God to be discerned chiefly by "more profound and systematic thinking?" Or do I misunderstand this distinguished scholar?

"The churches of to-day do not teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character. The reason is that they cannot present a cause which can command the total allegiance of men. The removal of social ills and the provision of more comfort for all men is not such a cause. Always in the days of its power religion has presented a cause which was more important and commanding than the comfort and happiness of men. To be sure, men found their happiness in serving it. But that is just the point. They did not seek happiness but were swept by great devotion to a cosmic cause and so were happy.

"Until the churches find such a cause, in other words, until they have a clear, convincing and commanding idea of God, they will only serve as second-rate assistants to those agencies which work to ameliorate human ill and promote human welfare.

"Religion must be sovereign or it is nothing. It cannot be sovereign unless it can lead men to discern God. It is not the fault of the churches that they are unable to do this. Their inability is due to the present state of thought and life. The greatest need of religion to-day is more profound and systematic thinking."

The following is a comfortable point of view. But why "too well"?

"I do not believe that there is anything seriously wrong either with what is taught in our churches or the manner in which it is taught. There is a sense, I should say, in which the church has done its work too well. The ideals of love, service, and of obligation to one's fellows which have always formed the core of Christian doctrine have become so widely disseminated in our civilization that we find them strongly held by many persons who are not formally members of churches."

What appears to be a reasonably safe dictum in social psychology is that the side which is *right* never needs to be afraid of discussion, for it always profits by it. It is only the side which is wrong that needs to keep things quiet. I cannot, therefore, agree with the implied criticism in some of the following excerpts for bringing up the question of the moral effectiveness of current preaching and teaching:

"The churches are effective and the assumption made that they are not working well is a mistaken assumption. If people would only recognize the good that is being done and not think it necessary to criticize and find fault and try to invent new things, but would give a whole-hearted

support to what is now being done by the churches, they would not have the attitudes of mind which are now being formed."

"I do not see how any person could answer your question except affirmatively, for the churches are one of the great sources of moral motive."

"The churches of to-day influence conduct and character far more effectively than those of us who are in detached service are apt to appreciate. What conditions would obtain without the church? At no time and in no age has the church or any other organization achieved the ideal, and the theological bias of much of the preaching of the past has often tended to divorce conduct from religion. Nevertheless, the moral codes of the Old and New Testaments have never been entirely neglected. The church has always given them a sanction which has quickened men's consciences."

"When we hear that the church is not proclaiming a message that is transforming conduct, I wonder if we are too far aloof in academic circles from the realities of life. Daily I am forced to be in the currents of life, and I find there is no factor so potent as religion."

"Speaking only for the Catholic Church, I feel that we do teach and preach a religion that can effectively influence conduct and character."

"I am persuaded that never since the days of the apostles was the church freer from dogmatism, and closer to the ethical dynamic furnished by its Master than to-day."

This analysis finds four distinct types of churches whose influence may be scaled from actually harmful to powerful for good:

"If the question is interpreted to apply to the actual influence of the churches to-day upon conduct and character, the answer is by no means positive. One might describe the ethical influence of modern Christian churches and church schools upon conduct in terms of a *scale*, ranging from a distinctly harmful effect to a great positive influence.

"*Negative:* The major influence of some churches upon conduct and character and a portion of the influence of many churches are actually harmful and a hindrance to the attainment of Christian ideals. For example: the bitterness aroused at times by theological controversies; prejudices fostered against other branches of the church, especially Protestant against Catholic and vice versa; political trickery in ecclesiastical assemblies; the sanction of the *status quo*, defense of war, racial inequality and the present economic system. The trouble here is that a part of the teaching and practice of the Christian Church is definitely *unchristian*.

"*Neutral:* Part of the teaching and preaching of the churches is wasted, so far as influence upon conduct and character is concerned. This result is due partly to the very limited contact which the church has with many of its members, one hour or less a week; partly to the emphasis upon "telling" rather than using educative processes which will stimulate thinking and purposeful activity. Much of the exhortation either never catches the ear of the child or adult, or goes in one ear and out of the other.

"*Limited:* A considerable portion of the energy of the churches to-day bears positive ethical fruit, but is seriously limited in its effectiveness for various reasons. Frequently the conduct which results is on a quite conventional plane; for example, honesty in personal relations but unscrupulousness in business transactions; or,

kindness within the family or at Christmas time to the poor, but disregard of the needs of multitudes in more remote areas. Often, too, the influence of the churches is limited because it stops with securing acceptance of general ideals instead of carrying on to actual enterprises in heroic Christian living.

*“Powerful:* Like the good soil in the parable of the sower, there are a comparatively few churches whose teaching and preaching of religion is bearing abundant fruit in conduct and character, “some a hundredfold.” It is true too that occasionally in almost every church there is some lasting and wide-reaching ethical influence. The key to such an effect is to be found, in my judgment, in enlisting the members of the churches and church schools in significant enterprises which make a real contribution to *the development of greater brotherhood, justice, and love in human relationships*. Effective results take place when, as Doctor Coe says, there is a reconstruction of relations between persons in the light of Jesus’ assumption that persons are of infinite worth, and that there is a Cosmic Person with whom we may have fellowship in these enterprises.”

### *Laymen*

This public-school superintendent of wide experience fails to find the church group ahead of the nonchurch in social ethics:

“Frankly, I doubt whether the church to-day is a very vital influence in shaping conduct, character, ideals, or ethics. I belong to a great many organizations embracing hundreds of our foremost citizens, some of whom are church men, many of whom have no connection with the church. So far as I can discover there is little difference



between the two groups in their outlook upon life and its problems."

In contrast with the preceding is this observation, qualified but hopeful:

"When church people move into a new region and do not become identified with any church, they become much more lax in conduct and character. I have known a few cases in which this occurred and later they would join some church and immediately they were much more careful of their conduct. Whether it is the preaching and teaching that makes the change I am not sure. It may be that affiliation with people that have a high standard makes them adopt that standard; but whatever it is, it is certainly the influence of the church and religion."

This correspondent is no doubt familiar with the story of the beam and the mote, but he fails to see that he is quite as dogmatic concerning the value of moral instruction as he accuses the clergy of being concerning religion:

"In my judgment the world will never be saved morally by this circuitous route of religion, and this is written by one who values true religion most highly. Furthermore, in my judgment, enormous good would ensue were our clergy disillusioned on the question of how little imperative their religious teaching is in preserving the moral life in the world. How frequently are we told from the pulpit that cessation of Christian activity would quickly result in the overthrow of civilization and usher in an era of moral chaos. This is such an exaggeration as to amount to a very dangerous misstatement. But the converse is true, that if forces making for righteousness, wholly outside and independent of any religious teaching, were with-

drawn from human life, the church would be utterly helpless to stem the wreck of the world. I believe the gain would be enormous were we to distinguish sharply between religion and morality and were we to seek moral goals by means of moral instruction and moral inspiration. For in our age there are no religious doctrines upon which can be based a powerfully effective appeal to a full-orbed moral life."

This may not be wholly complimentary to the preacher, but it touches the question at issue:

"When I go to church I worship throughout the service, and am inspired to think many of my problems through successfully. I think I hear most of what the pastor says, but that does not matter greatly."

The question whether man is for the Sabbath or the Sabbath for man was once settled authoritatively. The question whether the church is for man or man for the church seems still to be at issue:

"The church has in many places become an end in itself. Men have been led to feel that if they stand by the institution and support its program and attend its services, even though the preaching is terrible and the whole thing an insufferable bore, they are doing service to God. They forget that this was the very thing that Jesus hated so whole-heartedly and tried so hard to overthrow."

When we speak of "the church" we may mean any one of several things: a social institution; an organization with officers, boards, and commissions; a great body of

people, members, with more or less common ideals, purposes, and responsibilities. The responsibility of this third aspect of the church we are somewhat likely to overlook, while we ascribe defects and shortcomings to the more intangible institutional aspect. The following comments bring us up sharply at this point:

“I usually have a class of high-school students who have absolute freedom in bringing before the class any question they care to have discussed, and they will not be censured because of any attitude in their reaction. These young people express a lack of faith in religion due to the shortcomings in the everyday living of the laity of the church. They are quick to cite dishonesty, graft, theft, immorality, and the double life lived by one who professes a religious faith, especially when this one takes an active part in the religious services, which to them are a mere sham. Again, they express a lack of faith due to denominational rivalry which often stoops to dishonesty and exaggerations. When the laity of the church stay away from the regular religious programs of the church just because they are tired, sleepy, or have a headache, or because it is a little too cold or a little too hot or rainy, how can one expect children in their adolescent age to have faith in the religion of their church?

“A father and mother, patrons of my school and leaders in the church, appealed to me to talk to their son, who they learned was doing questionable things and associating with objectionable young people. I sought such an occasion and casually approached the young son. He immediately said without any hesitation, that if his father and mother had sent me to him to give advice as to his conduct, to please return to them with this message: ‘Tell my father that if mother knew the places he fre-

quents, there would be something doing at home. Tell my mother that my playing cards for money is no different than for her to go to her Four Hundred club and play all afternoon and have her name appear the next day in glaring headlines in the daily paper as the champion Four Hundred player and designate the fine prize she won.' "

If this modern business man is right in his analysis, we are indeed on the wrong track. If he is wrong, his pastor ought to help him get straight. In any case it is likely that he represents rather a large group:

"The teaching of religious doctrines is rapidly disappearing from our liberal pulpits for the reason that clergy and laymen alike have come to distrust the truth of these doctrines. Some of these old doctrines, such as atonement, rewards and punishment in the next world, etc., were once somewhat effective in stimulating moral character. But with the passing of the doctrines our clergy have been obliged to fall back on biblical ethics. Quickly it became apparent that the Old Testament had to be largely disregarded as an authoritative source for moral ideas and inspiration. Accordingly, during the last twenty-five years the Christian ministry has relied almost exclusively upon the precept and example of Jesus for its main instruction and with very unsatisfactory results. To cite only one case: Jesus' views touching the secular life—so central in his teaching—show how inapplicable to modern life his ethical philosophy is and suggest why the present teaching of the clergy is so ineffective. It is ineffective because the clergy do not and dare not with frankness expound the central moral teachings of Jesus; and if expounded, such teachings are so foreign to the spirit of modern times that they would be expounded in

vain. At the core of Jesus' teaching was his conviction that to live nobly one must leave the natural physical life and enter a coterie devoted wholly to spiritual things in order to make ready for the miraculous coming of the Kingdom. Dilute or soften this plan of action as much as you will, it will still remain unsuitable in this age and land for a strong appeal to moral living. Jesus' life and teaching are the wonder of the ages, but "the old order changeth, giving place to new," and while a verse here and a verse there may for all time be the final expression of that truth, surely his vision of the good for his people is not the good for ours."

These typical aspersions on overhead authority, however well or ill founded, offer food for careful thought on the part of all higher church officials. Every organization man should start each morning by remembering that a danger inherent in all organizations, secular or sacred, from the beginning of time is for the organization to become so concerned with the running of its own machinery that it tends to lose contact with the common life and needs for which the organization exists:

"It is tragic to know how long and hard the young preachers have to work to secure graded lessons, teacher training, church nights and the like, particularly in small towns. And often the district superintendents side in with the seventy-year-old board members."

"Those who have to do with church administration and organization make no direct attempt to develop coming leadership. When a minister graduates from the seminary, has been formally accepted and ordained by his church, and is once placed, his training stops. By train-

ing is meant development in leadership. Unless he is a man of very unusual make-up he is molded by his community and becomes a creature of circumstance instead of a leader of people. In my church we have what is called a "district superintendent." In all my experience I have yet to learn of a district superintendent who explained why he assigned a minister, why he felt that minister would help that community; give any indication that he knew the problems of that church other than that the financial report showed a balance or a deficit, or make a single effort to help a young minister get started right."

"'Big-business' methods may be the approved thing for industrial organizations, but accounting systems are not soul-saving devices. Competition between churches; within the church; between classes; county Sunday-school organizations; overemphasis on banner schools may get pupils temporarily and add to total enrollment, but I fail to see where it adds to self-control and good conduct. Character is not developed mechanically."

"Civilization is a thing of slow growth, but that is no especial reason why all church boards should be composed of only the oldest members of the church. Four brakes may be required on the automobile but one or two ought to be enough on church boards."

A century, two centuries ago, practically all knowledge was accepted on the ground of authority. Someone said this or that was true and the one who made the assertion being a great "authority" in his field, there was nothing for the mass of mankind to do but accept the dictum until some other "authority" came along with a con-

tradictory statement. This method held for the material world as well as for the realm of spirit. Now, however, no authority is too great to be questioned and no statement of fact is considered final. The dogmatist carries no weight with the educated person either in the field of science or of religion. As suggested in the following excerpts, some churches have not yet changed their methods to agree with the trend of modern thought:

"The present generation does not care for and is not interested in church and religious doctrine and dogmas. We are getting more and more out of patience with precedent. If the old model does not fit into modern requirements, we discard it and bring out a new one. We do not want to be taught via the lecture method. We want to be *doing* something. We want to see a thing work out."

"As I see it the church must approach the modern youth with a philosophy of life rather than with the claim of a body authentic fact or information. The church claims to *know* too much that cannot be recognized as knowable, and the philosophy which the church presents must seem to meet a real need. If it does not do this, it will be rejected."

"Society in general, and particularly youth, is rejecting the assumption of knowledge on the part of the church, and in doing so is in serious danger of losing its confidence in the institution that has made the assumption."

"From my contacts with youth of high-school age I am sure that the teachings of the church are making little impression upon them; and our best teachers lament the fact, while they acknowledge it. Youth to-day

simply will not accept the dogmas of the church, and in its heart does not believe the professors of dogma to be sincere."

Though the present generation is slow to accept dogmatic assertions about God, it is hungering as man has always hungered for the *experience* of God. A religion cannot prosper on a system of *disbeliefs* alone; it must have a positive, compelling dynamic built on the reality of experience at its center:

"The tendency of the teaching in our theological schools and of our eminent divines is to emasculate Christianity. They have taken from it heaven, hell, the divinity of Christ, and the personality of God. There doesn't seem to be enough left to rally around. If there is, it isn't made sufficiently attractive by the preachers. It would seem to me that *Christianity must find something more vital than it now presents if it is to be a living force in the lives of men.*

"In the process of escaping Fundamentalism we have somehow lost effectiveness in religion at the same time."

Let it again be remembered that our purpose in this study is not to prove the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of present preaching and teaching, but, rather, to discover churchmen's estimate of these functions. It should be remembered too that the citations represent observation and opinion on their part rather than scientifically measured results.

From the study it seems evident that at least a con-



siderable section of the church as typified by these correspondents does not much believe in the influence of preaching and teaching if *measured by the conduct and character effect*. And any institution, a large proportion of whose leading exponents (and the group contributing to this study *are* leading exponents of the church) have lost confidence in the functioning of the institution must change its procedure or still further suffer in prestige and influence.

This change of procedure may conceivably be in either one of two directions as the situation may require. If it should be that those whose confidence has been lost have falsely judged their institution as to its effectiveness, then they should be shown their error and set right so that their confidence will be restored. If, on the other hand, it should turn out that those whose confidence has weakened are right in their judgment of inefficiency, then the institution should thank its lucky stars for the insight that discovered the defects and the courage that revealed them, and zealously set at work to cure the weakness. True loyalty to the church and whole-hearted co-operation in its enterprises can exist only on the basis of wholesome respect for its program and achievement.

#### CORROBORATION FROM RESEARCH

While such matter is no part of the original intention of this study, it may be worth while to pause briefly

at this point to note the findings of research on the relation of church contacts and religious instruction to character.

Professor Hugh Hartshorne and Professor Mark May have for several years been conducting extensive character researches, first at Columbia and later at Yale University. In this investigation they have studied hundreds of children of various types, ages, and environments. In briefest form these are some of their findings as they bear on our particular question:

(1) From extensive tests given many children in such traits as cheating and copying in school work, telling lies about their own achievements, taking unfair advantage of others, etc., no relation was found between such conduct and the number of years of Sunday-school attendance. Nonattendants made as good a record as regular attendants.<sup>1</sup>

(2) Character traits investigated by the same men among other groups of children were: kindness and helpfulness, loyalty to their group, generosity, self-control. Here again no relation to Sunday-school attendance was found, or so slight a relation as to be negligible.<sup>2</sup>

(3) The correlation of moral knowledge (knowledge of right and wrong) with Sunday-school attendance was *slightly negative*. In one high-grade neighborhood it was

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<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Deceit*, The Macmillan Company. 1928.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Service and Self-Control*, The Macmillan Company. 1929.

found that those who never attended Sunday school made a better score on the character tests than those who attended somewhat regularly.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Hightower in a study of the relation of biblical knowledge to character and conduct found no relationship between knowledge of the Bible and such traits as honesty and co-operation. A group of delinquent boys included in his study passed higher biblical tests than normal boys.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. G. R. Mursell, in an extensive investigation into the relation of religious training to delinquency, found that the hundreds of delinquents he studied had had more school training and passed higher tests in religious knowledge than an equal number of normal boys.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Goodwin Watson may go somewhat beyond the degree of positiveness justified by the few researches which have been carried out in this field, but he has the present weight of evidence on his side when he says: "Scientific investigations have revealed beyond any reasonable doubt that people given the religious training now common in homes and churches do not develop characters superior in the ordinary virtues to persons without such training."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> *Studies in the Organization of Character*, The Macmillan Company, 1930.

<sup>4</sup> *University of Iowa Studies in Character*, 1930.

<sup>5</sup> Doctor Mursell is psychologist for the Ohio State Department of Public Welfare, Columbus. His report is at this date unpublished.

<sup>6</sup> In *Christian Century*, May 26, 1931.

Thus we have the sorry satisfaction of learning that scientific procedures tend to corroborate the empirical observations of our correspondents. Yet the case is far from hopeless. For no one has yet proved that religion *as it may be interpreted* lacks power to transform conduct and character. In fact, many of those who contributed to our study expressed an unswerving faith in Christianity and insisted that the relative failure of the religion of our teaching and preaching to control character is due to causes lying wholly outside the essence of true Christianity. To these causes we will turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

## GIVING RELIGION ITS CHANCE

IF the religion offered in our churches to-day is not successfully meeting the needs of modern life (as a majority of our churchmen say), where does the difficulty lie? Is human nature still too little advanced to respond to the high ideals of Christianity? Is Christianity, as some are alleging, impracticable for a complex society such as ours and suited only to a simple, primitive society like that in which it had its origin? Or does Jesus possess the dynamic to control men's lives no matter what the conditions under which they live, and are we failing to discover and use that dynamic in our churches?

These are vital questions and the church must meet and answer them. It has not yet answered them for conditions as they now exist. Nor will it serve to give either *a priori* or dogmatic answers. The only answer that will serve is the answer that springs out of successful achievement. If the church is to regain its prestige, if it is to be a positive force in the spiritualizing of modern life, it must find a way to make the Christian message of pulpit and classroom take hold of men's ideals and motives more strongly than it seems now to be doing. A young Japanese said to the writer, "If you want us to

accept Christianity, you must show us that it works in your own civilization." We may go farther and say that if we want our own people, the youth of our land and the half of our population who now have no connection with the church, to accept the Christian appeal, we must be able to show them that it works in the lives of those who in theory accept it. If professed allegiance to Christ, if membership in the Christian Church, does not register to a discoverable degree in daily conduct and character where man meets man in the routine of living, then the church has little ground to stand upon.

It should be noted that those whose rather unfavorable estimate of the character effects of present teaching and preaching was recorded in the preceding chapter in practically no instance expressed doubt concerning the *potential* power of Christianity to take hold upon and elevate human lives. Their lack of confidence was in our present-day interpretation of religion and in the adapting of its message to modern life. Let us now, as in Chapter II, turn to their own statements for the causes which stand in the way of religion proving its effectiveness. This was the second of our original questions: *Why is not religion showing more effect on conduct and character?*

#### ATTEMPTS AT DIAGNOSIS

##### *The ministry*

"One of the subtle dangers of the present time in the

work and thought of the Christian Church is the temptation to pessimism with its enervating effects. I feel that to some extent the professional religious educationist is responsible for this. It is a bad business to be forever checking one's heartbeat and taking one's blood pressure; and with the best intentions in the world the scientific method is doing just this. I feel that it is the obligation of all professors in schools of religious education to develop for pastors and people a technique of rich and overflowing optimism, the sort of abundant life one finds among the men and women of vital sainthood in almost every church."

Which is better, optimism based on a false sense of well-being, or a frank and courageous facing of the truth? The religious educator with his scientific method is not a pessimist, but neither is he a pollyanna. He, in common with forward-looking ministers, wants to know the facts in order to build upon them a more effective program for the church. The two preachers whose comment follows reveal no pessimism, yet they do seem to be "checking heartbeats and taking blood pressure" in their churches. Is it not likely that the bringing of a more vital Christianity into our churches will come, not from the findings of conferences and conventions, but from the earnest, analytical seeking of men such as these who believe in the power of religion but are dissatisfied with its outcomes in the lives of their people?

"My answer is but a conclusion from several years of confused inquiry into the reason for my own seeming fail-

ure in bringing things to pass in my ministry. We must not blame conditions, inside the church or out. The gospel has been equal to conditions from the beginning. It must remain the responsibility of the preacher. Is his message equal? In our transition from the maze of many theological conceptions of the past to the firmer, purer, and I think, truer interpretations of to-day we have lost the realization of the fact that our gospel is a militant gospel. The respectable irreligious world has risen to our plane of living in many ways. The older of us seem to have lost our vision and the younger men seem to come to us without the vision of the need of militant preaching. The sane and sure militancy of Amos is surely lacking in our midst."

"My church seemed at a standstill with no observable results, and I was seeking for a way out. I began by listing the activities in which the young people were themselves interested and engaged, including problems they themselves were meeting. What an array! I admit that I was alarmed but I was going through with it. In the list were such subjects as 'necking,' 'dancing,' 'sex relations,' 'war,' 'race relations.' Why not? Here is life. Here is where men live. Here is where the young people come to grips with life. Here is where Jesus and the church must speak if they have anything to say. So we began our discussions. Immediately there was new life, new interest, as we tried to discover the solution of some of these problems that had been passed by so many times without a thought. I believe a new conscience is developing and new ideals taking hold."

As long as religion was looked upon principally as a means of preparing for a future life there was no con-



fusion about its function. Now that this aspect has fallen into the background and religion has been coupled more directly with living the present life, there is less certainty concerning the part it should play. Ask a dozen preachers or directors or laymen or bishops, "Just what common fundamental needs in human life should religion serve?" and you are likely to get a dozen answers so different from each other that it is hard to find a common element. Are we not in sore need to-day of a new philosophy of religion that will relate it more intimately and vitally to the daily life with all its social implications? This need is suggested in such excerpts as the following:

"Religion is not working better because we are not yet sure as to what religion is, and we have no definite moral code or even moral ideals toward which we expect to move people. So long as we confine our discussion to the morals of personal conduct we are perhaps definite—honesty, cleanness, etc. But as soon as these are extended to apply to the social life of our times we are not agreed as to what is desired. Each social group in American life has its own standards, and as a general rule to-day that man is considered ethical and moral who is loyal to his own group. Religion is being used to-day to sanction the standards of all the groups."

"The reason why religion is not working better is that it is too often expressed in too general terms to be effective; that is, it is not related concretely to specific issues. For example, we discuss loving one's neighbor and do not see the incongruity in supporting a political party that

stands for a protective tariff which is an important cause of international friction."

"Emphasis upon morals and ethics in religion is a comparatively recent emphasis. I believe it will work out in life as it is continually stressed."

What explains the difference in the spiritual dynamic coming from different pulpits and classrooms? There are pulpits, for example, whose occupants employ no sensational methods or advertising propaganda but which from Sunday to Sunday face crowded pews and even regretfully see people turned away for want of space. Surely, the attraction is not in the magnetism of the preacher, for some whose drawing power is greatest are quite commonplace on the personal side. It is not eloquence, for some whose influence is farthest reaching are not above the average in speech. No, the secret is not in any such superficial things; it is in *the vital message the preacher bears* to the hearts and minds of his hearers. This rule seems to hold quite without exception: Wherever you find a preacher or teacher with the power to draw and hold people week after week for his instruction you find a man who is first of all close to life. He interprets religion, not in terms of the past, but to meet the problems that lie deepest in the daily experience of his people. This man also seems close to eternal verities; though open-minded and the farthest possible from dogmatism he has deep convictions. He is concerned with the lives

of people more than with the running of an organization. This line of thought is continued in the following comments:

"If occasions for teaching and preaching could be generally viewed as group clinics where ideas for personal and social welfare and adjustment were presented to be taken and used, there would be more of an incentive to carry the ideas into daily life. I heard a man say yesterday that this was one of his purposes in attending the church services."

"The religion that is preached to-day is not clear as to the most vital elements it itself contains. There is no definite assuredness as to what is fundamental and what is secondary. Every position has been challenged until no single tenet seems to rest safe. The effect of scholarly criticism is felt to the degree that the former positions and beliefs have been disturbed and we have not yet been able properly to evaluate the immense fund of new knowledge acquired recently, to search out what is, after all, fundamental in the teaching and preaching of religion. The best that the present day ministry seems to be able to do is to preach a loose system of ethics until more sure positions are arrived at."

"As long as the church is more interested in the type of religion she handles than she is in the type of human beings she produces her weakness in effectively influencing conduct and character will be evident. There seems to be more real passion for the building of good character and proper conduct into childhood among those who are active in the field of character training apart from the church than among many of those most active in the church."

Probably not without a reason there has arisen in the minds of many persons a conflict between "spiritual content" and "technique" in religious education. Some have feared that scientifically trained teachers and directors were more concerned about correct educational procedures than the spiritual quality of their instruction. Increasingly it is becoming clear that there is no necessary conflict between correct method and religious content in teaching. On the contrary, there can be no such thing as good method with poor content; and it is equally true that the best of content may lose its value because of poor method in its presentation:

"The blind can't lead the blind. The vast majority of preachers and teachers still act as if they assume there is magic in discussing a few biblical verses. They seem to be blissfully unaware that good common sense is needed to make religion real. A vast proportion of those who teach for the church don't seem to recognize that character grows the same as the body does. In short, because the leadership of the church's educational staff neither understands the psychology of growing life, nor what constitutes religious education, character and conduct development goes begging."

"Untrained teachers mouth ineffectual platitudes of a past age; they complain of the lessons; they are either too uninterested or too lazy to view the whole series as a unit; they teach a lesson for that day. Is it any wonder that the teaching is ineffectual? Many preachers to-day are ineffectual in preaching. The layman in the pew is conscious of a better education and intellect

than the man of the cloth. Result: he won't come, and he won't take in the sermon. Many preachers have failed to adapt themselves to the age of the machine, the big organization, industry, and the society thereby produced."

"The plain fact is that no one to-day really cares to live the Christian life in its truest and fullest sense, even teachers and preachers of religion themselves. Otherwise there would be a few more crucifixions among the Christian ranks. If we had the manhood to face a few crosses, religion would become more effective."

"The religion that is potentially effective is not working better because as far as preaching goes we are too much concerned with "saving souls" in the old acceptance of the term. And, on the other hand, there is a temptation for those who think they have a better interpretation of the phrase to lose the zeal which did make the old approach effective."

"The reason for the failure of the church at this point rests down upon three basic weaknesses in the whole program of the teaching ministry of the church. These three basic weaknesses are: *First*, Curriculum. There does not seem to be available a satisfactory curriculum, either in the narrow sense of subject matter or in the larger sense of the word, including the whole atmosphere and experience of the individual child. *Second*, the heart and center of the problem seems to be the fact of untrained or inadequately trained leadership. How could a satisfactory curriculum—if we had it—be presented by inadequate leadership? The *third* weakness of the educational system of the church is the fact that there is no satisfactory technique by means of which the gap can be bridged between knowledge and behavior. We lack the necessary scientific facts."

“The preaching of the liberal ministers is primarily to adults. These days few children and young people remain for the church services. The Sunday school is inefficient, and the young people’s society has little influence. Lack of the historical viewpoint of the Bible. Many parts of the Bible have teachings that are detrimental to conduct and character of the right kind. The Protestant church has failed and is failing continually really to train childhood and youth.”

In spite of all the specialized training in religious education given in our colleges and universities these specialists will not be the chief influence that will lead to improvement in the educational programs of our churches. The very meagerness of their numbers compared with the number of churches, if nothing else, makes this impossible. Furthermore, no matter how highly trained and efficient the director may be he can accomplish but little without the intelligent support of the pastor. As go the pastors of the Christian Church at large for the next generation so will go the program of religious education. Many ministers are coming to see the truth of these statements:

“I am convinced that until the seminaries insist upon all students for the ministry taking a thorough course in religious education there is little hope that the churches will effectively influence conduct and character. Some time ago I was asked by a brother pastor what the work of a director of religious education really is. If the pastors do not know, how in the name of common sense is the laity as a whole to know and understand? And how

is the pastor himself to preach and teach and lead his people into the kind of life which will develop the finest Christian character."

"There is not the carry-over which we should expect, because there has been too little attention paid to the carry-over process, and too much emphasis on the 'message.' We have assumed that if the 'message' be preserved and transmitted intact, the desired conduct and character will be established. But we have another think coming!"

"I believe first and last in the principles of religious education; also in the modern approach to all questions regarding and related to religion and character. Yet it seems to me that for some reason we have failed to catch that contagious personal glow that makes our religious teaching carry over, and makes religion something to be desired."

"Among other things I think might be listed, hidebound traditionalism, unwillingness to try new methods, and almost total failure to recognize changes in the psychology and temper of modern times. The nearest I can come to a solution is that all of us should now engage in an open-minded experimental study of the question. What is character? And how is it created? I don't know. I certainly wish I knew."

Is not the reason for the tragic divorcement spoken of here the fact that so much of our preaching and teaching has been unrelated to life—and therefore a matter of dead formalism? Are college youth any different from their elders in their nonapplication of religion to life?

"One of the great disillusionments in working with col-

lege youth is to find them so ultraconservative and perfectly willing to accept without question an economic order with all the pagan principles and injustices that are so apparent in this one under which we all live."

Not a few ministers seem to feel limitations placed upon them by the organization and demands of the church itself. This factor is frequently mentioned in the letters, sometimes with considerable asperity:

"Denominational promoters should cease to bring pressure to bear on the local minister for numerical and financial results, thereby rendering him the victim of high-pressure methods for church membership and money-getting and making it more difficult for him to express and teach a spiritual message."

"My candid criticism of the churches is that they are victimized by the business-efficiency and "program-bug" of to-day. I have attended conventions and conferences galore, large and small, of directors, ministers, and so on, and have grown sick and tired of hearing about plans, programs, methods, efficiency, charts, plants, child psychology, leadership training, and the like. Those who know me would think this a strange statement for me to make because of my identification with the vanguard of religious education in this state. But I think we are missing the point when we neglect to discuss *religion itself*, what it is, how to get it, and whether we have got it. I went to one conference not long ago, the most fruitful one of all, and the only question was 'Do I know God, and am I leading others to him?' I think there is grave danger of getting lost in 'programism.' The chief influence in the world is still personality. I am coming more and more to believe that real religion



which bears fruits in character is a handed-down thing, from individual to individual. The church's program may bring people within the sanctuary, educate them in religion and all that, but it takes an individual to make religion genuine and lead a soul to the city of God. I might go so far as to say that a modern program may be a real hindrance because the folks in that church leave evangelism of individuals to the program. We are lost in educational theory and programs and, perhaps unconsciously, look upon them as ends in themselves rather than a medium by which religion can be transferred from individual to individual."

"To preach the social gospel is to take wide risks with one's ecclesiastical life. And a Modernist in theology is anathema."

"Protestantism does not seem willing or able to pay the price of the implications of its own freedom. It is far easier to rest in the thought of infallible Pope, church, or book than to think through to personal convictions and act on them. The church or individual willing to pay the price of achieving the spirit of Jesus will ultimately command a hearing."

Typical of other obstacles mentioned by the clergy as in the way of making religion effective for the shaping of conduct are the following:

"One reason for the ineffectual working of religion is the potent kind of salesmanship featuring all sensual pleasures in newspapers and magazines. This has led to the secularized mind. Happiness can be bought with cold cash. The newspaper is the Bible, and the challenge to

'do and dare' spiritually falls on deaf ears of him who seeks pleasure alone."

"Things interfering with the operation of religion on character are: the promotion of so diversified and multi-form a church program as to dissipate the central aim and effort; (1) diversion into fields of activity not directly related to religion with the result that social and other interests tend to usurp the place of faith and regenerated living; (2) failure, largely through preoccupation with incidental and relatively unimportant matters, to keep the ancient truths freshly interpreted in terms of the best thought and most newly discovered facts of the present age; (3) the tendency to substitute moral and theoretical character-building processes for the dynamic of a Christ-controlled will."

"Control of the church is largely in hands of old, conservative people. The radio and the movie have placed before everyone the very cleverest of entertainers, and many pulpits suffer by comparison. The dollar mark in business and the block letter on the campus show appreciation for what men are doing in the world. The church has worked out no satisfactory equivalent for either the dollar mark or the block letter. The claims of religion are so demanding that people are prone to attempt any escape from its stern requirements."

### *Directors of Religious Education*

Professionally trained workers in religious education have sometimes been criticized or feared on the ground that they place techniques ahead of spiritual reality. Their comments on our question, however, show them as alert to the necessity for a vital religious content as the ministers themselves:

“There is a dynamic which we must lay hold upon and open up to those whom we lead if we would influence character. Words and phrases such as the following have been typical of the recent trend of the meeting of our Ministerial Association. ‘There’s something somewhere that we have not laid hold on.’ ‘The early church did it in that fellowship in the upper room.’ ‘The week of prayer and fellowship.’ ‘Let the revival begin in us.’ ‘That they may know we have been with the Father.’ There is no present sign in the meetings or among the men of an oversentimental state. It seems to be a sincere search for a dynamic now lacking in the churches and their leaders.”

“The general situation will be greatly helped when the seminaries (and I believe they are doing it) change their entire curriculum. The seminary course that the older ministers have had laid the chief emphasis on a certain body of information. Too few of the older men look back on their seminary days and say, ‘My teachers led me to a deeper religious experience.’ Even in my day the informational side of the seminary course was the chief thing. Since leaving seminary I have had to discover for myself the deeper experiences and the most effective methods of dealing with mankind.”

“We have built the framework of morality in the life of the child through our teaching, but often we have failed to change the inner motives and desires of the individual. They want to do right, but the sufficient urge to carry out the want must be there. This, to me, is the heart of the matter. The love for Christ as a Saviour, and the love of Christ in the life is that motive power to bring actual being into our religious teaching. There must be intense loyalty to Christ and his cause. Some of our youth who have been willing to pay the price do have this spirit.

The average young person in our church to-day does not have this loyalty."

"We talk of child-centered programs, new curriculum, new methods; but I feel we do not take sufficiently into consideration the biggest factor—Christlike living in the older group to whom the young look for ideals."

"Our group here is devoting many meetings this year to an earnest search for the dynamics, or sources of effectiveness, of the Christian religion."

The fallacy of reasoning in a circle is not absent from our correspondence. A considerable number say that religion is not working effectively because so many Christians do not live up to their ideals. But that is precisely our question: *Why* don't they? Statements such as the one next following are equivalent to saying that religion isn't working well because it is failing to work. In the second comment we are asked to grant the major premise.

"Religion is not working effectively largely because the principles taught are not applied in the organizations or churches teaching them. There is enough of theory and platitude, but teaching will find lodgment in conduct and character only when it is effectively demonstrated in the lives of the individuals and in the social and business practices of the institutions and organizations sponsoring the teaching of religion."

"Granting that the preaching and teaching is character and conduct-shaping, upon what grounds would one be justified in saying that the results are not satisfactory?"

Another mistaken point of view, as it seems to the writer, is represented in this excerpt from the letter of a city director:

“There is one question which I should like to have the experts discuss, and that is why, in so many instances, the best religious education methods fail to develop a high appreciation of the church and its worship services in young people. Nearly all of my young people are regularly received into the church, but after confirmation they are rarely present at worship, although they have one of the most beautiful auditoriums in the city and a rich worship service. In my experience here I find at present much restlessness on the part of a number of ministers concerning the religious education methods and church attendance. I am becoming more and more convinced that if we could get the young people, as well as older ones, to attend the worship services of the church, there would be a great improvement in character and conduct, for I am convinced that the most effective force in shaping character and conduct is the preaching function as exercised in the pulpit. From some of the rumblings which I have heard I am led to believe that the time is not far distant when a cold-blooded evaluation of present religious education methods in relation to church-worship attendance will be made.”

The fallacy of this point of view lies in the supposition that the church school is chiefly responsible for attendance or nonattendance at the general church service. Why should the church expect or need a supplemental agency to *send* people to its services? Why should not the worship service of the church stand on its own feet

and exert its own drawing power to lead people to *come* instead of demanding that they shall be sent or persuaded by another organization? If, on the other hand, this writer would say that the church school should so spiritualize its members that they will desire to attend the worship service, this may be conceded. But such a result would mean that teaching may have a power over character denied to it in the foregoing comment.

Is it not likely that the church to which this director refers should seek the cause of the disaffection of youth toward its services in the character and quality of the services themselves rather than in the church school? The correspondent says the worship service is "rich." But services may be rich to one class or group and decidedly unappealing to another. Whatever may be true of the services of this particular church, it is undeniable that the worship service of the church in general is of adults, for adults and by adults. The music is usually attractive to the young, but much of the ritual is meaningless to them, and the sermon (aimed at adults) dry and over their heads. Again, while these youths never have recitation periods (informal laboratory periods are an exception) of more than fifty minutes in the public school, here they are expected to go from a one-hour Sunday school immediately to a church service usually lasting an hour and a half. The simple fact is that the the usual Sunday-morning church service has never con-

sidered the needs of childhood and youth. It originated long before the time when childhood had been "discovered" as different from adulthood; and, in any case it is doubtful whether the adults of the average congregation would consent to any modification of services to which they have become accustomed and which they enjoy, in order better to suit them to the requirements of the young. Adults have so long been accustomed to the chief seats in the synagogue that they would find it hard to take second place.

I would urge this church and a thousand others which are meeting the same problem with their young to hunt for a beam instead of a mote. This correspondent touches the difficulty:

"Not having learned to worship with appreciation, the boys and girls try the church service in grades six, seven, and eight and find no satisfaction there. The worship there is an appeal to the older mind. It is other-worldly and largely meaningless to the early teen-age. Most of these pupils drop out both of the Sunday school and the church worship because they feel they are getting nothing out of it."

Repeatedly the following note recurs in our correspondence. Is there anything different in human nature to-day from what Amos discovered in the days of old?

"We go on preaching and teaching ideals which we are not seriously attempting to achieve, and which we do not expect the children whom we teach to achieve, or to

take very seriously, beyond the point of being respectable citizens and accepted members of supposedly good society. The people whom I serve do not want a religion that interferes with their selfish, materialistic incentives in living. And anything which causes youth to question that which is, is dangerous."

Dr. John Dewey's *The Search for Certainty* reveals a demand deep-seated in human nature. We seek to know, we desire to feel secure, we are uncomfortable and ineffectual while in a state of uncertainty and suspense. The present age with its scientific discoveries, its prying researches, its inquiring scholarship has broken down many important certainties and left something very like chaos in their place. Probably this is inevitable, since man must go forward in his quest or cease to be man. But in the meantime religion suffers at many points from the weakening of its foundations. While we are finding new grounds for certainty many will be groping blindly:

"Intellectual problems and a desire to make religion scientific in this age of science have made the leaders rather fearful and uncertain as to what they themselves believe. They have lost the realities; because of this they have lost power. As a result of these two things religion means so little to them that they have nothing to give to others, not enough of power or force to influence character. This is a very harsh statement and possibly a radical one, but I feel that it is the truth. Unless our religion can affect more than the intellect it is not going to have power enough to make very much difference in everyday living."



"The ministry of the church is itself rather bewildered in these days of transition between the conservative, authoritative interpretation of the Bible and the modern, scientific approach both to the Bible and life. Every church has two groups: the older group will not change its thinking religiously and the pastor's work more nearly satisfies them than it does the other group, the young people. Usually the young people are asking themselves the meaning of such terms as conversion, redemption, atonement, the cross, etc. Their questions are going unanswered. Where their questions are not answered, they are not going to continue to worship."

"The average teacher and too often the average preacher is quite hazy as to just what he believes himself. I do not mean by this that he should be dogmatic—far from it. I do mean that religion must be taught in such a way that we will tear down through all its dogmas and superficial statements, down to the real things that will stand the tests of to-day. In other words, I cannot afford to have an 'accepted' religion, but I must study and experience until I have discovered a religion that is really my own. Just to say that I believe in God does not mean very much unless I can fairly clearly state what kind of God I believe in. Just to say that I believe in the principle of love does not mean very much unless I can clearly see the implications of that principle for my life. We have talked too long in general terms."

The following comments on a religion so institutionalized that it cannot fulfill its function for the individual reminds the writer of a request sent to a distinguished bishop for counsel concerning the meaning and practice of worship. The good man, harassed no doubt by the

exacting demands of his great office, replied that he was "too busy with the affairs of the church to give this question the attention it deserved"—time for making the wheels go 'round but no time to throw the light of his experience and insight on worship.

"Some of the grave hindrances to-day are evident in the general administration of the church. The competitive spirit that leads to a sort of town hall, Kiwanis program does not make for the increase of the kingdom of God. The results on paper too often please the higher-ups in the denominational offices where the Kingdom and statistics are largely synonymous. Too often also such methods are pleasing to the local official board if finance has been the outcome of the 'hurrah' program. The other day a minister told me that the Bishop three years ago instructed him that 'if he did nothing else, he was to reduce the church debt.' This minister is depending upon that bishop for another church in a year or two. He is reducing the church debt."

"In the large churches, involved church machinery without dynamic power to move it is the most evident thing. To keep things going, the 'snap-the-whip' method of the modern business man tends to make Jesus a business man—if they are thinking about Jesus at all. Many of the business men in important church positions bring to the running of the church the same methods and the same spirit with which they run their business. So busy are the pastor and committees in running the church program *right now* that there is no attempt to set goals which extend over two or three or four years. Pastoral changes come so often that pastors regard a goal set years ahead as futile. In our large cities and often in the suburbs, so many transient mem-

bers are connected with the church that they never become interested in goals of endeavor."

Directors of religious education recognize that, after all is said and done about "programs," life responds to life and personality takes for its standard and model other personalities. Here as in every other line of human endeavor personal leadership is the greatest need—not persons with good intentions only, but persons who also have something to give others and the skill necessary to give it in such a way that it will be received.

"The church generally is too weak in its leadership. During the years that I have been here I have seen men and women change from the old point of view of religion as a cloak to be put on, on occasion, to a modern outlook, seriously attempting to carry out the Christian ideal in the relationships of life."

"The successful church must have a ministry and teaching force of sufficient intellectual and spiritual capacity effectively to counteract the contrary pull of present-day conventional standards and attitudes in social, economic, political, and religious life."

"We await a religion grounded in the scientific method with a warm and glowing social idealism as its chief characteristic. Many of the teachers and leaders look upon religion as something, at best, of only secondary importance to the major concerns of life and therefore make no effort to prepare themselves better to carry on their work of leading and teaching. Somehow we shall have to get teachers who have an abundance of enthusiastic interest in teaching religion and a willingness to undergo special training to equip themselves better.

The home environment of the pupil, the organization of the family life about ends not particularly religious or social, make the influencing of conduct on the part of the church's program well-nigh impossible. To influence conduct and character we shall have to get a concerted attack upon the problem by the home, the school, and the church, using all the scientific methods that have been devised to achieve our ends."

### *Workers in Overhead Church Organizations*

On a recent Sunday morning the writer tuned in successively and repeatedly on three of the most important radio stations in the Middle West to find a satisfactory sermon to substitute for church attendance. The first preacher was telling his hearers to read history, insisting in eloquent phrase that only as one enters into the lessons of the past is he able to understand the problems of the present. The second preacher was discoursing on the joy and inspiration to be found in the beauties and grandeur of nature. The third was talking of the economic crisis and showing the silver lining to the cloud. No one of the three made more than the most distant and general reference to religion. No one of these three preachers had anything to say that could not equally well have been said respectively by a professor of history, a professor of science, or a professor of economics. Is such preaching, preaching that lacks a vitally religious challenge, perhaps one cause of the spiritual indifference so common in and out of the church?

But preachers are not alone in their failure to bring to their hearers a true religious stimulus. Again it is Sunday morning. Church school is in session, each class in its own little stall off a common passage way. Pausing outside a classroom one hears a group of young high-school boys and their teacher. The topic is football, which is all well enough providing there is something more than that. But no. From beginning to end the discussion is of local teams, past and future games, the chances for the season, and so on. At no point is there the least reference to any problems or principles having even remote moral or religious significance. Good fellowship of a kind is the most that could possibly be claimed for the occasion. A similar pause outside the classroom of a group of girls yields the same impression except that their talk revolves about certain social affairs of the week—chatter and gossip. Another trial and one hears a men's Bible class in action. This time there is a religious note strongly in evidence—a religious note of a kind. The question at issue here is on the virtue of different types of baptism, with the scriptural authority for each. In no one of these three classes was there any attempt to think through any problems of experience common to the group in the light of Christian principles. Religion was given no chance; how could it influence conduct or shape character when it was ignored or made trivial?

Let us turn now to some related points of view presented by our correspondents:

"What young people need above everything else is to see the connection between a modern religious philosophy and their daily conduct; and a connection between the worship they engage in on Sunday and their daily acts. Just how to establish that connection is to my mind the major problem of religious workers. The young people need to learn how to criticize their own behavior on the basis of recognized values. They need to submit themselves to a discipline whereby they are forced to make this criticism. Their families for the most part do not furnish that discipline. Neither do the schools."

"In Protestantism as well as in Catholicism we are still accepting our religion in terms of creedal beliefs rather than in terms of religious experiences. Our pastors and church-school teachers on the whole do not really believe in an individual religion or religious experience. For that reason they do not tackle the actual problems, actions, and experiences of to-day, but resort to the exposition of teachings and beliefs of other days. Many of them have not had a new idea of God since the time of their conversion. They still believe more in supernatural events than in the progressive life of God in the life of man. It seems to me that this is the heart of our problem."

"One reason why religion is not working as well as it ought is that it is trying to change character and conduct instead of trying to lead men nearer to the Power which alone will make hopeful the effort to change conduct and character. A great deal of so-called religious teaching and preaching to-day is entirely on the ethical and social level. It proceeds direct from man to man, instead

of from man to God and back to man. I have just no hope that we are going to do any better in producing character than any of the great Greek and Roman philosophers did so long as we make our approach to people along the lines of ethics and philosophy. It is a matter of history that when, as for example, in the evangelical revival in England the church calls men's attention to God as revealed in Jesus Christ, revolutions in character are wrought through simple, direct preaching of religion."

"In our preaching of religion we have been understressing the dynamic side of it. There is at this present moment a revival of æsthetic worship. Churches are being built on cathedral lines, elaborate liturgies and rituals are being worked out so as to approach God beautifully. Everyone with any æsthetic sense enjoys and appreciates beauty in architecture, music, and liturgy, but I confess frankly that I hope for as little from the cult of beauty as I do from the cult of righteousness as such. The cross is not beautiful, but it is dynamic, The simple, unadorned, challenging presentations of Divine truth that were made by Jesus Christ were indeed beautiful, but the beauty was not sought for its own sake; it was merely incidental to the tremendous conviction of One who himself lived in immediate fellowship with the Source of Power."

Not only every psychologist but every serious-minded person knows that terribly insistent desires and inclinations often get in the way of the conduct which our code tells us is right. The older theologians called this factor in us original sin and later scholarship calls it original nature. But whatever it is, it is a very real problem in character. Motives that are strong enough to sublimate

or overrule wrong desires and impulses must be found if behavior is to follow ethical lines. Many churchmen deeply believe that the Christian religion has this power, but that our present teaching and preaching fail to reveal its Source in a compelling way:

“Our church activities are so enmeshed in programs and organizations and departmentalization and segregation, that we lose sight of the power that must drive our complex machinery for service. We need to get back to fundamental and vital factors. We need to re-emphasize the need of experiential religion, as vital to the whole problem. ‘The kingdom of God is within you,’ said Jesus.”

“Churches offer ‘escape’ instead of challenge to the individual. They do not face problems of conduct and character inherent in group and individual responsibilities of the day, such as: international policies, sex, birth control, interracial relations, industry, leisure. Churches lag much behind the public schools in educational methods, trained workers, adequate equipment, nonoverlapping organization.”

“The youth whose lives are now under my influence are demanding a personally pragmatic gospel. I find that I am not in the least embarrassed in offering to them the unadulterated gospel of Christ. They seem to feel that his gospel is authoritatively sufficient because empirically sound. Their one question is, ‘Will it work in my life in practical situations and in contemporary life situations?’ When his gospel is presented as principle rather than program, they seem to be eager to follow him.”

“The reason for the ineffectiveness of our preaching and teaching is largely because the theological ideas are out of



harmony with the accepted facts of life and therefore make no appeal; or, where they have made an appeal, seem to have had no influence on conduct. These same ideas were developed in a day when life was totally different from the way it is now being lived and the issues were of a totally different character from the ones now confronting society. I see little hope for a church that is for the most part established on these theological ideas in any attempt to grapple with the problems of our present-day civilization."

"It is hard to find teachers who are trained sufficiently to carry over to the children the fundamental ideas of Christianity in terms that are quite in keeping with modern conceptions. Most of them stick closely to the biblical form and background, and in doing so carry over ideas that are no longer fundamental to our thought."

If every preacher and every teacher would re-examine the religious message and interpretation that he brings to those under him in the light of these interpretations of our problem, it is likely that astounding changes would follow in both content and method:

"The Christian religion has within it those elements that are imperishable, the fundamental power to change, transform, glorify human life; and in so far as the ministers of our churches are able to find and set forth those abiding, fundamental forces of Christianity, they will succeed in helping to bring the church into its place of influence and power. You know how well Jesus himself was able to pass by the traditions of the elders and all of that cumbersome network of ideas that was thrown round about the law to penetrate into the very heart and center of it all and set forth to his disciples simple and sublime

teaching that made him speak as never man spake. Now, if we can do the same thing for our generation, tear away all that the generations since Christ have built up around the central teaching of Jesus and set forth in clear, convincing word and picture those truths that are fundamental for our life now, we will see a great new revival of interest in the church and of influence upon the moral and social life of our communities. Some preachers are doing this. Their messages are clear, vivid, and powerful, and are finding response among those who are thinking in the newer terms."

"*Types of preaching and teaching:* (1) Preaching and teaching *without purpose*—traditional interpretation of the Bible or repetition of the stories of Scripture, repetition of the truisms of religion and ethics, largely the result of classical and theological training which has removed the preacher from contact with and understanding of the problems of experience.

"(2) Preaching and teaching of *protest*, consisting of eloquent attack upon the evils of the world, usually confined to that part of the world outside that particular parish, but *suggesting no way out*.

"(3) *Cautious* preaching and teaching—conscious of social, economic, and political problems. The preacher is careful not to offend the men who keep up the church budget.

"(4) *Rare* preaching and teaching of the essential realities of religion should shape character and conduct. But the youth whose characters are plastic are not present and the pillars who are have found their present conduct too profitable to care to change it."

"I do not feel competent to declare just what the matter is. I can only suggest what I feel it to be. I think that our theologies and our ecclesiasticism have greatly clouded

the issue. I feel deeply conscious that E. Stanley Jones is pointing the way out. My own experience with the congregations that I have served and with the college group at this center confirm this opinion. I would not say that we should go back to Christ; I would say that we should go forward with him. I have a feeling that people—and sometimes our preachers—hold him as a kind of touchstone by which to test theology, rather than as a living, glorious Personality, the interpreter of God and of life in all of its aspects. I do believe sincerely that an honest effort to follow him would bring to our people increasingly high ideals of living and a growing sense of power to practice their ideals. At least I discover this—that those who are approaching their religious problems and their daily living from this angle are succeeding much better than those who do not.”

Shall we apply the theory of relativity to religion and say that relatively we are making progress by standing still?

“If teaching and preaching were of the vital and dynamic kind, it would not necessarily follow that we should even then immediately capture the world; for in accounting for any force we must consider what opposing force it overcomes as well as how much it pushes forward. Might it be possible that to-day religion is exerting a tremendous force even to stand seemingly still? I hesitate to make this excuse. I am not sure that this is at all an interpretation of the situation. I am only saying that it might be so.”

### *Professors in Colleges and Seminaries*

Just what through the possession of religion may one have or do for himself or what can he do for others which

is impossible without it? The recurring question of the function of religion in the total of experience is clearly brought out in this analysis by a professor of religion:

"The Christian religion of to-day is not functioning as effectively as it might because teachers and preachers fail to make clear the exact area of daily life within which religion is guaranteed to make a difference for the better to the individual. They are not answering the question as to exactly how the religious man has an advantage in his daily life over the man who is not religious. They do not specify definitely what help religion provides and how that help is made available.

"This uncertainty about the function of religion in daily life is comparatively recent and is especially damaging to the appeal of religion. Formerly the value of religion was clear: it helped men master their fears. But the fears that formerly held men in their grip have largely ceased to function as fears against which religion could provide a safeguard. It is now commonly said that men cannot be frightened into being religious, but teachers and preachers have not discovered the appeal that can be effectively substituted. Consequently, they too often allow themselves to recommend religion in general terms instead of an account of specific values to the individual which it may be guaranteed to produce. They need to discover specifically what religion is good for in the modern world and then to advocate it for that."

"Christians and others engage in the same kinds of work, enjoy much the same sports and recreations, and discharge about the same obligations as citizens and in about the same way. In such a situation teachers and preachers are failing to make clear just what kind of things a Christian does that unmistakably distinguish

him as such. An unfortunate use of the contrast between the man who is merely moral and the man who is religious has resulted in a widespread impression that a man is religious not on account of his conduct but almost irrespective of it. The total result is confusion."

One practicable thing the Protestant Church could do that it is not doing, at least not doing thoroughly enough, is to improve its schools. After gratefully acknowledging the improvement that has taken place in certain more progressive church schools the fact remains that we are on the whole but playing with the religious education of the young. This is true on several counts: We touch probably not more than one out of four of the Protestant children and youth; we run our Sunday schools on a plane so far below that of the public school in curriculum, teaching, and equipment that there is no basis for comparison; we spend our church budget on almost everything else but the education of the young; we train our ministers chiefly to deal with adults. Such facts are so common in our churches that they are taken for granted and excite little comment. They have become a tradition and anyone who cries out against them is looked upon by many as an iconoclast and a disturber. Yet they are in the way of making religion effective as a character influence among our people. The following comments from churchmen emphasize this point:

"The educational system of the Protestant Church is not based on scientific and effective principles. We are only playing with the task. I do not believe that everything that we desire can be done through a process of education in the church, but we may surely believe that if we did our work in the church school as effectively as we try to do it in the public school, there would be a much greater result."

"The present attitude of neglect of church leaders toward the educational task is designed to develop in the minds of young people a hearty indifference to the educational system and to the worth-while results that we profess to be seeking. When we take our task seriously, I believe those growing up in the church schools will take the work seriously and that real results can be achieved."

"A life-centered approach in the curriculum is very meager. Occasional reports are encouraging, but the percentage is very small. Few teachers have a conduct or experience view of influencing human nature. The administration of few churches makes it possible for a teaching or character-influencing type of leadership to function. To repeat, the teaching function of the church is not sensed; and where it is, it is very largely in terms of material-centered lessons rather than lessons in living."

"Although I am a product of the so-called modern theological school I do not feel that the present output of such institutions is adequately trained for the task of making effective the dynamic aspects of Christianity in conduct and character."

"I believe that the difficulty goes back largely to the leadership of the churches, the church schools, the teachers of the courses, and the Boards higher up, in whose hands largely is the preparation of our lesson materials."

It is easy and "safe" to show up the defects of the teachers in our church schools; most of them are not trained for their task and are painfully aware of the fact. But to reflect on the clergy, the product increasingly of the colleges and seminaries, men who have had seven years of higher schooling—that is quite a different thing. Yet the professors whose criticisms are quoted in the excerpts that follow find many flaws in the work of the preachers. Whether these professors stop to reflect that the men they are criticizing are the product of a training for which the professors themselves are responsible is not so certain. Higher education must accept its share of responsibility for such defects as exist in its product:

"The pastor, engrossed with business and social demands, is failing from spiritual starvation. Shackled by the needs of the present situation, he fails to portray the vision and the exhilaration of life on the mountaintop."

"We are just now at a transition point in the work of the pulpit. When my father was a minister he was looked upon as a preacher and as one who had a 'message.' The minister in short was an oracle. To-day he needs to be an interpreter, to find out the best in any community and to build upon that as an interpreter. I don't know of a book on homiletics that approaches the question from this standpoint. Until this attack is made upon character education the church is going to play a losing game, at least as far as its pulpit ministration is concerned."

"Our theological seminaries give us much valuable

guidance in the interpretation of the Bible and in the history of religion and of the church but provide very little which gives us insight into human nature and how to influence it. Aside from a course or two in the school of religious education, my seminary training has not been as helpful to me as a short experience in a mental hospital studying human nature in its abnormal forms under the guidance of the chaplain, a part-time instructor."

"What preacher ever expects his people to do the things he recommends in sermons? The very fact that he does not expect it weakens the sermon's power to do it. Religion is preached too many times as a formal or customary procedure and not as a vital way of living. It is too often a helpful and pleasing social procedure necessary for self-respect for individual or community."

"Preachers are preaching too many messages on irrelevant themes—themes that are supposed to capture the interest of the curious and argumentative; not enough that makes for efficient living for a better world."

No principle is better grounded in education than this, that *only the objectives which are consciously sought and definitely planned for are attained in any measurable degree*. Is it not likely that in our teaching and preaching we have failed to make the modification of conduct and the growth of character a conscious objective of first importance? Have we not somehow assumed that contacts with the church and a certain amount of biblical and doctrinal instruction would result in good and let it go at that? Some such thought seems to have been in the



minds of the correspondents from whose letters these comments were taken:

"The churches that are transforming conduct and character are the churches that are creating issues in the thinking of the people—issues that are related to present-day thinking and living. Many churches are creating issues but not all of them are present-day issues. The churches that are causing thinking on peace and war, race relations, youth, adult life, personal religion in the twentieth century, etc., are churches that are shaping character and conduct."

"The difficulty is that most preachers and teachers talk about things that are irrelevant to the moral life. This is due to: our theological training which has to do with heaven, hell, Christ; criticism higher, lower, medium, indifferent; crowd movements, especially congregational behavior; sermon building; bibliolatry of all hues and what not; other-worldly approach to religion; religious institutionalism, whereas religion is essentially personalism; dogmatism and absolutism in a day of experimentalism and relativism; shying away from particular human situations that demand creative Christian effort to discover the way out; intellectual uncertainty on the part of religious leaders about moral and spiritual procedure; lack of the spirit of adventure on the part of religious leaders."

"Too few have intelligently and seriously attempted to connect vital and dynamic religion with life. A beginning has been made by some churches. These must thoughtfully employ tested methods of guiding conduct and shaping character with religious idealism and motivation, and then willingly experiment to discover methods of effective teaching and preaching. Their number, with a like attitude and approach, will increase."

"Some of the reasons why things are not better than they are might be cited as follows: In the phrase of H. C. King, 'the seeming unreality of the spiritual life'; the inertia of human nature; the natural impulses of mankind which, if unorganized and undirected, lead to wrongdoing; the failure of many of our ministers to face the actual problems of contemporary personal and social life in their preaching; the fact that many of our ministers do not represent the highest grade of ability because theological education in our country is largely free; a devotion to literalism in the interpretation of scripture; intellectual views expressed in the pulpit which are out of tune with the best in the field of contemporary scientific thinking; failure adequately to develop a technique of mysticism which is convincing; the tendency of superficial churches to follow the fads of the year in seeking to attract people."

"I find in my teaching experience that the great difficulty with too many young people is that they associate religion with something dogmatic, theological, or merely formal instead of having been taught to look upon it as a matter of right relations and right attitudes. So many of them are surprised to discover that essential religion consists in a right attitude toward oneself, one's neighbor and one's God; right, not because it follows some prescribed code but because it answers the needs which we sense most clearly when we are at our best."

Many persons, as we have said, look askance on such terms as "technique," "educational procedures," and the like, believing them to stand for mechanism rather than for the spiritual content or meaning of what is taught or preached. Yet the vital criticisms which follow deal

largely with matters of technique, or procedure. Especially poor method on the part of teachers and preachers, as it seems to the writer, is the attempt to find in the Bible "problem solutions" for individual cases as they arise. The teachings of Jesus, for example, nearly always dealt with particular instances; and these instances had a very different setting from the problems that arise among us. It is the entire spirit and philosophy of his teachings that we should seek to understand and apply, not particular passages:

"In some quarters there is too much emphasis on particular interpretations of scriptures rather than the inculcation of its spirit. Christ has been interpreted too much as a lawgiver rather than a builder of spiritual ideals."

"Too many of our teachers have been satisfied to teach facts rather than principles. The historic facts of the Bible influence character very little, but the ideals and principles of the Bible, if once caught, are great influences for good."

"Religion is preached and taught too much in the abstract. A great proportion of the religious teaching in the church schools is subject-matter centered rather than life centered and thus fails to influence conduct. Most of the sermons I hear deal with religion in the abstract. Many of them are beautiful and inspiring, but they deal with such glittering generalities that they are perfectly innocuous so far as influencing conduct either positively or negatively is concerned. They are so abstract and so far removed from life that it is impossible to bridge the gap between theory and practice."

Concluding the comments which we shall quote from the professor group are these which deal with various aspects of our problem:

"I believe that churches are industrious enough but are giving too much attention to setting up systems of external control rather than trying to establish internal controls. Of recent years the church has appeared to me, at times, to be too 'nosey' and meddlesome. Many to-day have come to think of the church as a sort of superpolice force rather than a source of inspiration."

"The task of the church is primarily to send itself into the heart of the community rather than to be occupied with getting the community to help maintain the church—two very different points of view."

"So many young people have been given an unfavorable impression of religion in their home churches by a group of consecrated but unintelligent leaders that it is very difficult around a university campus to make religion 'rate' as one of the satisfying experiences of life."

"There is a craze to-day for big things, large numbers—everything must be on a big scale. The successful pastor to-day is the one that receives large numbers into the church, that has 'packed houses' to hear him preach. People are urged to join the church irrespective of qualifications. Anybody can get into almost any church; I have known no one turned away because of any lack of qualifications. Especially is this true of men of wealth; they can join any church without changing their lives to any appreciable amount, and they are not made uncomfortable in the church because of church doctrines or practices so long as they contribute liberally."

"Never in the history of the world perhaps have there

been more counter-attractions. The church of the former generation did not have to compete with the movies, the aeroplane, the automobile, and the radio. All of these things now are pulling hard on the time and purse of churchgoing people."

"Religion is not working better to this end because there are other influences that undermine what may be done by our public school and the church. Among these factors I would put the lack of home training in religious matters, the influence of the radio, the press, and motion pictures. I recently took my boy, who is six years old, to see Rin Tin Tin. He was interested in the dog but during that two hours of motion picture program, Rin Tin Tin was on the screen less than five minutes. And then the producers of the picture made him act unethically. In addition to this there was some shooting, a home destroyed, and a general mix-up that thoroughly confused my son. The motion picture house was crowded with youngsters of ages from six to twelve, with a great crowd waiting outside for the second show. In our city we have fairly high standards and do not even permit motion pictures on Sunday nights. But it is my judgment that in two hours of such pictures, you can destroy all that may have been done in the church and school, in perhaps months of hard work."

"The official boards mostly, and in many instances the pastors, are promoting 'churchianity' rather than the religion of Jesus which motivates character and prepares for Christian living. Much ado is made over special meetings intended to revive the cold and indifferent membership. Too much energy and expense are devoted to writing letters to a membership composed of the active, the inactive, and the dying and dead in order to interest them in paying more money to the church for

local and foreign work, and on some new series of sermons, etc. The pastors in most instances act as if the ranks of the church are recruited from adults only who lost out in religion years ago but who because of a lack of religious education in their earlier years are well-nigh hopeless. In short, the average pastor (and church) is not educated in the program of religious education. The Sunday school seems to be an institution in which the clever leader is supposed to keep the children interested and out of mischief till the Easter ingathering in some lucky year. Even with the situation as bad as it is, it might help if the pastor would state publically once in a while that the Sunday school is the biggest arm of the church, rather than act as if it were running in lively competition to his own program."

In these two comments are a welcome note of confidence from men who can see great difficulties in the way and yet keep up their courage:

"On the other hand, I see in the life and teachings of Christ the one hope of the future, and there are many signs that his teaching is to-day very much more effective and more appealing than it has been in the recent past."

"It is my own conviction that we shall go through a very strenuous time in understanding our own day and in developing statements of religion that are best fitted to it. In the meantime many experiments are being made, both in the statement of principles and in practice. I do not believe there is any quick solution for this general situation. On the other hand, I am convinced that beginnings have already been made and that there will eventually appear a more vital and commanding religious faith than any previous form of Christianity."

*Laymen*

Constantly is it necessary to remind ourselves that "the church" does not consist wholly of the ministers and the teachers:

"I could give many illustrations which convince me that our everyday conduct as members of the church breaks down the faith of our young people in the reality of religion."

"I am deeply interested in this question, but I feel hopelessly unable to say or do anything that would help in its solution."

"So far as I can discover, there is little difference between those of us who profess to be religious and those who do not. Youth will not accept the dogmas of the church when it believes the professors of dogma to be insincere."

"Christianity is at present in dire need of a new ethic, and the materials for it are at our door."

"I have not given the matter enough consideration to make my opinion of any value."

This public-school superintendent may be over severe in his criticism, but his accusation contains a principle to which the church should give earnest heed:

"Schools are building up health programs, citizenship experiences, vocational guidance, and practical courses that are developing good citizens with better morals while the church with an hour or two a week is attempting to improve on the work by asking children to listen to an untrained teacher talk on Jonah and the whale."

This college-trained layman accuses the ministers of a lack of insight which he seems not to hold himself responsible for possessing:

“Religion is suffering to-day because a majority of the preachers do not know what Christianity means in terms of present-day problems.”

In spite of our intelligence tests, I.Q's, A.Q's, and all the rest, it would probably be difficult to prove or disprove the rather common accusation of which the following is a type:

“The men who go to the seminary and the men who come out to fill our pulpits are of inferior mental caliber and too soft in character for their task.”

It is a much more difficult thing to counsel one person than to address an audience—just because it is harder to solve a particular problem than to state general principles for problem solving:

“Many have turned to spiritualism and other isms because when the old dogmas seemed insufficient and when they went to the man of God for help, they were told just to ‘have faith,’ and that it was ‘sinful to raise such questions.’”

It would be unfair to give the impression that our correspondence brought no negative reaction to the author's part in the inquiry. While most of those who answered entered heartily into a discussion of the problem, a small minority seem out of sympathy with the study, as these excerpts indicate:



"There is something the matter, but I do not believe that answers to your questions will help us discover what the matter is."

(One could wish that, since this correspondent took the trouble to reply, he had been a little more specific.)

"I have some very decided opinions on this subject and expression of them might give an answer, at least in part, to your questions; but I doubt if it is wise for me to attempt to do this."

(Why the secrecy?)

"I have little sympathy with the various and sundry questionnaires and conferences which seem to look toward bringing all the waters into some definable channel. Let them spread and soak up the arid areas of human life, when they want a channel, they will find one or more or make them."

(William James said that the average writer or speaker takes to figures of speech when his thought becomes hazy and he doesn't know quite what he means.)

"The hysterical wails over the inability of the doctors of divinity or pedagogy to tabulate and formulate what is going on in the leavening of life with essential Christianity excite me very little. The fact that potent religion to-day is pretty largely lost in the stream of life does make hard sledding for logicians, dogmatic theologians, and other professional religionists. It is a great day, however, for the kingdom of God which does not come by observation."

("Potent religion—largely lost in the stream of life"—

Who was it that said language is given us that we may conceal our thought?)

“Those engaged in research work, standing aside and critically studying religious currents, are frequently in serious danger of missing the real significance of it all, our excess of study and critical attitude depriving us of the more normal opportunity enjoyed by many of our coreligionists in other walks of life ‘just to trust—just to take Him at His word—just to rest upon His promises—just to know thus saith the Lord.’ ”

(Beautifully expressed doctrine of *laissez faire*.)

Each of our three hundred correspondents who contributed to this inquiry would no doubt agree that he had not offered a complete solution for the problem. Naturally, this would be impossible in a letter even if the writer had the philosophy of a solution completely in his grasp. In fact, it is more than probable—indeed, quite certain—that all the contributions together do not tell how to make religion control the lives of men. This is an age-old problem forever taking new forms as the conditions of life change. Its solution has to be worked out afresh for each succeeding age—more than that, for every individual human being.

The really encouraging and hopeful thing that stands out from the responses of these leading churchmen is that most of them are keenly alive to the character-forming obligation of religion; that they see the present ineffec-

tiveness of Christianity as preached and taught for that end; and that they are earnestly seeking for a way to make their own work and the influence of the church at large more telling in conduct and character outcome. Complacency, that stupefying sedative which cripples the power of so many institutions and persons, is giving way to new purpose and determination in the church if this group is representative of the larger body.

One does not need to labor the fact that the moral potency of religion cannot be insured by paper programs or smoothly worded hypotheses. Symposiums, conferences, and forums have their place, and it may be a very necessary and important one at a certain stage of a movement. But whatever changes are made, whatever ground is gained, must come finally from the efforts and insight of individual ministers and teachers in their respective churches. Only experimental proof of the reconstructive power of religion in congregations and classrooms and in the hearts and lives of men and women and youth will prove or disprove our various hypotheses. Many, perhaps most, of this group give evidence of a purpose to seek ways through their own activities of putting this experimental proof more fully to test.

## CHAPTER IV

## STEPS TOWARD IMPROVEMENT

OUR concluding chapter will be a brief summary and restatement, and an attempt to discover the implications of our study.

1. *Is religion as we are now interpreting it in our preaching and teaching effective for the motivation of conduct and character?*

To this question 28 per cent of our churchmen answered "Yes," 36 per cent "No" and another 36 per cent gave a qualified answer. Those closest to the activities of the church (ministers and directors of religious education) were most negative in their answers of any group except laymen. Therefore any implied criticism of the present-day teaching and preaching cannot be charged to uninterested or hostile drones or outsiders.

The preponderance of opinion was that religious persons differ so little from nonreligious that the distinction distressingly often fades away into nothingness; and that this constitutes one of the chief obstacles in the way of interesting young people in religion and the work of the church.

Contrary to these points of view, a small number of cor-

respondents declare that religion is acting as a powerful control in present-day conduct; that all is essentially well with the church; and that meddlesome investigators should let such questions alone and not arouse doubt and pessimism.

The defense is also made that things are now not worse than they always have been, for there is always a wide gap between profession and practice, between creed and deed. The argument is, essentially, that the defect lies in human nature and that the moral discrepancies which trouble us are to be expected, so why worry? All things considered, we are lucky to be as good as we are.

A further word should be said about such inquiries as the present and the possible arousal of pessimism. The author receives the mild excoriations aimed at him as a "scientific observer" in the friendly spirit in which they were no doubt intended. But he cannot let pass the implication that all attempts to diagnose the present situation in the church either springs from or tends to result in pessimism. Public education has marvelously improved its efficiency during the last generation as the fruit of the spirit of inquiry and diagnosis. President Hoover's many commissions are inquiring into the effectiveness of various governmental and social agencies in the fulfilling of their supposed functions, and good is already beginning to appear from the investigations. Industry and commerce owe much of their success to

their close study and diagnosis of social and economic conditions. The great philanthropic Foundations make social, educational, and religious research one of their leading functions. Why should the church alone assume that it is above or beyond the need of scientific inquiry into its activities? Why should it trust to tradition and uncritical empiricism as its guide? And why should any intelligent person assume that attempts to apply scientific methods to religious problems have their motive in pessimism? Would it not be well for these fearful ones to distinguish more clearly between the flippant, irresponsible, and uninformed critic of the church who makes capital out of its supposed deficiencies for his articles or books, and the friendly critic who studies the church in order to help it better fulfill its purpose?

Only for those who must have a support for their courage is the thought that things are no worse now than they have been before of any significance. We do not argue that ignorance and illiteracy are no worse now than in former generations; we go at work to remove them. We do not say that misgovernment in Chicago is no greater than in New York; we, occasionally at least, turn the rascals out. Human life has improved marvelously on the physical side; we live twenty years longer than we did sixty years ago; we have comforts, luxuries, time- and labor-saving devices, contrivances that annihilate time and space. Yet on the moral side life was probably

never as difficult, in America at least, as now. Our material advancement has on the whole made the attainment of character harder instead of easier. And many competent observers are convinced that the results of this lack of environmental balance are coming to show in national character. Again, those who would pray and work for the coming of the kingdom of God have no business asking whether these times are on the whole better or worse than former times. Their concern should be whether our age, all things taken into account, is making its share of progress toward that kingdom.

Some defenders of the moral effectiveness of the church put themselves in a logically impossible position. On the one hand they claim as the achievement of religion all that they consider best in our civilization: hospitals and orphanages, the monogamous home, equality of women, prohibition, democracy, universal education. On the other hand they excuse the relative lack of influence of organized religion to-day on the ground of the social indifference and evil which religion has to meet. Now, passing over for the moment the validity of the more than doubtful claim that *all* the good in our civilization is the product of religion, these protagonists must see that if religion has in the past had the dynamic to produce the results they ascribe to it, then it should still possess the power to combat successfully the evils of the present. If democracy sprang from Christianity, then Christianity,

properly interpreted and applied, should have in it the antidote to more of the evils which now infest our social and political democracy. If universal education came out of religion, then the church ought to be able to make education in religion itself more effective than it is at present. If prohibition is the offspring of the church, then the church should be able to take a more effective part than it is now doing in curbing the evils of intemperance. To say that all moral and social uplift has come from religion is to place religion potentially above the power of evil, to hinder its progress and throw the responsibility back on those who interpret religion to society.

The truth is, of course, that not all evolution in individual and social character is the product of religion, and that not all derelictions in conduct and character are to be laid at the door of the church. While religion should touch and bring its influence to bear on every area of human experience, there are many other factors besides religion acting on life to beautify and ennoble it. The responsibility of religion for the upbuilding of humanity is a divided responsibility; likewise is the responsibility of religion for human failure and degradation a divided one. So we should not blame all the moral failure and tragedy in the world on the weakness of religion; but neither should we excuse religion from doing its part in the spiritualizing of life because there are "lions in the way." Regardless of causes or proportionate responsibili-



ties, all will agree that these are difficult times, and that every agency which exists for the betterment of mankind should do its utmost to help our people, and especially the young, to follow right conduct and develop strong characters. The question is, therefore, not whether our teaching and preaching of religion is, all things considered, in *some degree* effective, but whether it is *as effective as we can make it*.

2. *How through teaching and preaching can religion be made a more effective influence on conduct and character?*

Regardless of the extent to which the church is failing or succeeding in its present efforts, this question is pertinent and pressing. It has been so from the days when Jesus was a reconstructive power on earth. It was the problem with which he chiefly occupied himself. It is the problem with which his followers will need to concern themselves till the end. For this necessity is involved in the very concept of the evolution of man and in the hope for the coming of the kingdom of God in human society. Until man is perfected in the image of his Maker there will be room for improvement in his conduct and character. It remains for our study to bring together out of the contributions of our correspondents and our own thought a few suggestions directed toward this end.

(1) *Let the church both in its teaching and its preaching make the influencing of daily conduct with its resultant char-*

*acter its first and greatest concern.* This the church has never done. It has sought to bring about conversion, assuming that a reconstructed life would follow (as it often does). It has taught its doctrines and creeds. It has made religion a source of comfort and hope to the individual, thereby greatly increasing the sum of human happiness. It has blessed humanity with school systems and provided for higher education. It has founded hospitals and orphanages and done innumerable works of mercy and kindness. It has gone into the field of public morals and given its sanction to this or that legislation. It has elected or defeated candidates for public office on moral grounds. But it has never yet made the building or the rebuilding of personal character an absorbing objective with its preaching and teaching shaped to this end.

One reason for this neglect is that a considerable proportion of the later church has followed the early traditions of emphasis on salvation for a future life. Especially has a large section of the church taught the doctrine of salvation through belief in and acceptance of a sacrificial atonement in a manner that has not contributed to the building of a worthy character from the practice of creative conduct. Perhaps, without being aware of the reason, the church has avoided dealing with the problems of living experience in its teaching and preaching because of the extreme difficulty of this approach as compared with

the doctrinal or the historical method. It is not an especially difficult task, for example, to prepare and deliver the conventional "scriptural" sermon, consisting as it so often does of a half hour's generalizing on perfectly acceptable truths. Certainly, it requires no great amount of time or effort to prepare the ordinary Sunday-school lesson as it is commonly taught. It may even call for no great amount of hard thought or studied skill to be "inspiring" in the pulpit or before the Bible class.

As long as one contents himself with expounding "the truth" (in the abstract) or centers his efforts on "the message" he is quite sure to be repeating generalizations which nine-tenths of his listeners have heard (and accepted or rejected) a thousand times. Such matter puts little strain on the brain cells of either the speaker or the hearers. It is easy enough, too, to teach (or preach) the ancient history of the Hebrews, or even (though a dreary proceeding) to "apply the lesson." Dead facts are harmless, helpless things to handle in the pulpit or classroom. It is when we face the actual problems of *to-day's life* and undertake to find a solution in the light of the Christian message and experience that we get into trouble. And, feeling our own weakness or incompetence to deal with the crucial things, or being unwilling or unable to pay the price in time, thought, effort, and prayer necessary for successful leadership in them, we fall back on safe and conventional topics. Following such a policy we teach

or preach obsolete facts, outworn doctrines, and pious generalizations that no one can object to and that none can use.

An old friend, half in fun and half in earnest, recently expressed, from the point of view of the pew, the difference in these two types of approach in preaching. I had asked him, "How do you like your new pastor?"

"I don't like him," came the prompt reply. "You see, it is like this. When I went to church with our old minister in the pulpit I could sit and think about anything I pleased while he preached his sound doctrine. He never disturbed me. But with this new fellow it is different. He talks all the time about the things I am thinking about and I can't do a thing but listen while he preaches."

A neat, if left-handed, appreciation.

The principle of creative teaching and preaching is, then, clear, but it is infinitely difficult of application: Start with life itself—not life in the abstract but life as met by the majority of your group. Even then *particular* lives will need to be sought out and helped meet their own personal problems. Do not "teach the Bible"; do not "preach the gospel." Touch life at its most pressing problem-points. Help those morally asleep to become *aware* of ethical problems. Clarify moral vision, quicken the will, steady the patience for the hard stretches. Reconstruct false attitudes, warm up the desires under

weakening ideals. Help to discover the significance of God, the meaning of life, the value of prayer. Especially let our preaching and teaching quicken the appreciation for lasting values, and thereby spiritualize the life philosophy of those we lead. And in all this we will not neglect the wisdom of the Bible nor fail to use the truths of the gospel, but we will remember that the Bible's wisdom and the gospel's truths first proved themselves in human experience before they found their way into the Book. Religion is but *life at its best*. The great business of the church is not to hand over a religion, but to help work out lives.

(2) *Let the church change the center of its emphasis so that the young will receive equal share with the old.* The parent church is now almost wholly adult. It is adult in its services, its policies, its officers and management, its congregations. The best of what the church has in material resources, in trained ability, in music and art, in overhead official oversight and assistance, misses those under high-school age at least, and goes to the older group whose characters are pretty thoroughly fashioned for good or bad and whose way of life is hard to change. Every church worker who is close to young people will tell you that youth resents having no part in the church except to sit in the congregation. Freely the young complain that as a rule they hold no offices, share no responsi-

bilities, help make no policies or programs. "We must," as one youth exclaimed, "lose our hair before we can be trusted to do anything in the church but listen to the sermon." If, then, the sermon happens not to deal with matters which interest the young, it is inevitable that they will drift away.

To follow out in effective practice the principle of making the activities of the church first serve the needs of the young would require many very fundamental changes. First and perhaps most difficult would be the required change in point of view, which is still preponderantly adult-centered. The training of ministers would have to be radically revised to make out of them educators rather more than theologians and preachers. The distribution of the church budget would need to be completely upset. Churches whose funds are limited and which are now paying three thousand dollars a year for music for the edification of the adult congregation, and three hundred dollars a year for its church school would have to reverse this proportion. The teaching of religion to the young is as sacred an office as preaching it to adults, and a sound educational policy will finally include paid teachers of religion whose preparation is adequate to their task. This will, of course, require a considerably larger budget than the church is now accustomed to unless savings are made in other directions. The church-school membership and program under this revised emphasis, would be quite as

much part of "the church" as the older group in the services of the auditorium, and not a more or less incidental appendage as in most churches at present. Especially would making the church a church of and for youth require us to shape our preaching and teaching in accordance with the law that habits grow and character is formed *not by listening to truth or exhortation, but by free action in the normal situations of daily living*. The way must be opened for expressing the ideals and attitudes which are formed, else they become mere empty vaporings. Tests show that delinquents can repeat quite as many moral maxims and Bible verses as normal youth from a similar environment. Character grows only out of right conduct.

(3) *Let the church in its teaching and preaching of religion keep it in tune with modern knowledge*. Intellectual honesty is fully as much a matter of morals as is commercial honesty. To state as fact with dogmatic certainty a thing which by its very nature can be but a matter of belief is essentially dishonest, and to the intelligent more than futile. Yet from certain pulpits and classrooms this is constantly being done. Men assume to tell you with unqualified assurance what God thinks, what God wants done, what the will of God is upon divers matters. They speak of some doctrine of their creed as if there were no more question of its verification than that an unsupported body falls or that two and two

make four. They declare with absolute certainty what will happen in a future life. They know beyond possibility of error God's plan for our lives. They speak as with superhuman authority on all sorts of questions concerning which no man can honestly say he *knows* anything whatever in the commonly accepted sense of being able to supply verifiable proof.

This foolish dogmatism, of course, defeats its own purpose with all intelligent persons. Those too young to discriminate between what may be *known* and what some persons *believe* are helpless under such treatment and can only respond with credulity. And no one knows how much of later doubt and skepticism has its origin in such indiscriminate confusing of knowledge with belief. No wonder the boy who had been under such instruction defined faith as "believing what you know can't be true." Somewhat older grown, our youth turn with revulsion and derision from such attempts to impose upon their intelligence.

Practically every advance made by science in interpreting the physical universe has been opposed by organized religion. And in its own realm science wins out every time, as, of course, it must. Then religion, defeated in the contest, readjusts itself to the positions it finally accepts and finds that no harm has been done to its basic values; and that it might far better from the first have welcomed the advance in knowledge. Thus we once lost



our earth-centered universe with "heaven one story up" and got in its stead a universe so stupendous that we are still trying to encompass it in imagination. Thus we lost our universe run by a God who, with his hand on the machinery, momentarily decided its movements much as one might guide an automobile, and out of the change we got the satisfying concept of the God of universal law. Thus we lost "special creation" and instead find ourselves in a process of evolution with the Infinite as the goal. It is hard to kick against the pricks of truth no matter what the realm.

Not all of our teaching and preaching has yet taken account of two great phenomena of the last half century: universal education extending through the high-school and college for an amazingly large and increasing proportion of our people; and the growth of the scientific attitude of mind among all classes. The junior high-school pupil of to-day knows far more about the physical world than the graduate of Harvard knew a century ago. And the Harvard graduate of that time would be as helpless before a science examination easily passed by our senior high-school students as the latter would be if confronted by his examinations in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The radio fairly spills science into our homes almost every hour of the day; the popular magazines are never without their scientific features; the daily paper balances its sensationalism with scientific facts and discoveries. Foolish indeed

is the preacher or teacher who tries to win or impress modern youth with a dogmatic presentation of religion. From the policy of strict intellectual honesty religion has nothing to fear, for it has proved as invincible in its own realm as science in its realm.

(4) *Let the church search out and emphasize in its preaching and teaching those features of religion which so touch the motives of action that good character results.* For example, fear is a motive that has been much used in religion: fear of God, fear of Satan, fear of hell, fear of the church. But fear is always a discordant element in the personality, and conduct based on fear rather than choice or assent leads to no strength of character. The modern weakening of the fear element in Christianity is a cause for satisfaction—providing that positive motives are found to take its place. Among the more effective sources of positive motives are:

Good will	Admiration
Friendliness	Affection
Appreciation	Love
Gratitude	Loyalty
Respect	Devotion

In the one direction these may lead out to God and to Jesus, and in the other direction to our fellow beings. Unless they have their root in human relations and

lead back to them, such motives will be artificial and unreal.

It does not require much of a psychologist to know that if one is to love God, then the God he conceives and believes in must be a lovable God. Love comes spontaneously or not at all. Great harm has quite certainly resulted to children from teaching them a distant God on a great white throne, or a savage, vengeful, unfair God such as pictured by the ancient Hebrews. Not one of the ten sources of motive we have listed could properly be called into action by such a concept of God as many sections of the Bible which have found their way into the church-school lessons present. The heroic and militant quality in Jesus which so appeals to youth has also been sadly obscured by picturing him as a "Man of Sorrows," a "willing victim" whose glorious life is neglected through the emphasis on his death. Great care is used by important men or their descendants in choosing a biographer who will represent the important man's character and personality so that it may not suffer when viewed by posterity. Are we as teachers and preachers good biographers of God and the Christ?

We have said that the positive sources of motive released by our sense of the character and presence of God and of Jesus may also be set into action by the sense of our relationship to other people. The teaching of religion should help us to find in those about us the

admirable, the lovable qualities such as will inspire respect, loyalty, and devotion. In our contact with human affairs there are also things we should dislike, hate, despise. These negative sources of motive have their place in producing action and are therefore proper objectives of religious training. It is perfectly moral to feel hate and disgust if they are directed toward truly hateful and disgusting objects or acts.

(5) *The church, each individual church, should seek to discover the points at which life most needs guidance and help, and then direct its teaching and preaching to these points.* It is true, of course, that the critical points in experience vary greatly not only for different ages but for different social groups. Further than this, in any given group each person's experience is unique. No two have just the same problems or meet the same situations. Yet in spite of this there are certain areas of experience in which typical problems are fairly constant just because they arise out of experiences which are normally universal, at least for any particular civilization. For example, problems of sex impulse, courting, and marriage are typical for all normal youth. Common also, with some modification necessitated by social and economic differences, are experiences having to do with the choice of vocation. Sufficient similarity exists in many of these areas of experience so that the guiding principles can well

be studied and discussed in groups, of the same sex in most cases, and of not widely varying ages.

Following are listed some of the typical areas of experience in which adolescent youth can profit by wise guidance and in which religion ought to find its greatest usefulness. In every instance the problem area mentioned is one in which youths have sought help from some friend or adviser. It is at such points that wise preachers and teachers will discover their choicest opportunities.

#### EXPERIENCE AREAS IN WHICH RELIGION MAY BE A FACTOR

##### *Relations in the Home*

Conflict or lack of sympathy and understanding between youth and parents.

The home needs the earnings of son or daughter, thus interfering with ambition for education.

The home objects to forms of amusement or associations thought harmless by the youth.

Disharmony exists between siblings in the home.

Parents quarrel with each other, making home unpleasant.

What the son or daughter owes to the home.

##### *Sex and Mating*

Sex impulses tempt to wrong personal practices.

Standards that should obtain in associations with opposite sex.

Cases in which sex attraction runs counter to ideals and judgment.

Age, economic, educational or other conditions that bear on time of marriage.

The ideals that should govern the sex motive in general friendships, in courtship, in marriage.

### *School and Education*

Going on to school versus taking a job.

The moral quality of scholastic dishonesties.

School work versus athletics or other extra-curricular activities.

The art of "getting by."

Does one owe society a debt for one's education?

Being *sent* to school when one does not care to go.

### *Religion and the Church*

Uncertainty about conversion or religious status.

Loss of belief in the inerrancy of the Bible.

Loss of faith as taught in childhood.

Loss of confidence in religion because of poor quality of many Christians.

Trouble over the concept of God.

The conditions under which one should join the church.

Whether one should give time to church activities.

Just what religion is.

Why try to force Christianity on people who have other religions.

*Vocation and Career*

Desired careers to which there are financial obstacles.  
Careers selected by parents but not favored by youth.  
Proposed careers preparation for which are interfered with by love affairs.

On what grounds to choose a vocation; sources of information.

The ready-at-hand job versus larger opportunities which require preparation.

Judging one's own fitness for a certain vocation.

Jobs in which one is required to do questionable things.

*Personal and Social Matters*

A feeling of one's own futility and inferiority.

Impulses and desires at war with each other.

Hunger for friendships and recognition that seem denied.

Worry over social rating and popularity.

Concern over religious status.

Personal habits that cause trouble.

Conflict between personal ideals and the standards of one's social set.

Clash between subjective moods.

Sense of sin, guilt and defeat from moral lapse.

There has been no attempt to make this list more than illustrative. It is, of course, incomplete, and there are no doubt adolescent groups which it would not fit. If

applied to one sex or the other, additions or subtractions would naturally follow. For younger or older groups a quite different range of experience areas is discovered. Especially should it be observed that no ready-made list of experience problems should be brought to a class or a congregation. Experiences which are actual and present are the ones with which the teacher or preacher should deal.

We have come to the end of this simple but significant inquiry. We have found that many devout churchmen believe religion and the church are not to-day successfully meeting the tests fair to put upon them. This conclusion does not carry with it any lack of confidence in the transforming power of Christianity over human lives. Whatever defects exist are, we believe, due principally to two facts: the extraordinary difficulties thrust upon the churches in common with other social agencies by modern conditions of life; the culpable slowness of the church to adapt itself to modern needs and conditions, both in the interpretation of religion and in its presentation through preaching and teaching. Our platform is not one of defeat and despair, but of renewed effort guided by deeper insight and clearer purpose. The Christian religion as Jesus lived and taught it has in it the key to conduct and character. Ours to find the key and unlock the door.



Lost keys are found not by chance or accident but by search, not by good intentions but by intelligently directed effort. Those who would find this key may begin their search in the library and study, and this will sharpen their vision and clarify their purpose. But the key when found will be discovered out where life faces its tests in the daily round of common activities. Character grows only out of conduct, and conduct is but our response to situations in which we must act. Bring religion into the motives back of our every-day acts and its leaven is sure to work.



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